IF YOU SEE SOMETHING WRONG:
The Life and Work of Raya Kadyrova of Kyrgyzstan

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2003 Women PeaceMakers Program

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ABOUT THE WOMEN PEACEMAKERS PROGRAM

Made possible through a generous grant from the Fred J. Hansen Foundation, the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice's (IPJ) Women PeaceMakers Program annually hosts four women from around the world who have been involved in human rights and peacemaking efforts in their countries.

Women on the frontline of efforts to end violence and secure a just peace seldom record their experiences, activities and insights – as generally there is no time or, perhaps, they do not have formal education that would help them record their stories. The Women PeaceMakers Program is a selective program for leaders who want to document, share and build upon their unique peacemaking stories. Selected peacemakers join the IPJ for an eight-week residency.

Women PeaceMakers are paired with a Peace Writer to document in written form their story of living in conflict and building peace in their communities and nations. The peacemakers' stories are also documented on film by the IPJ's partner organization Sun & Moon Vision Productions. While in residence at the institute, Women PeaceMakers give presentations on their work and the situation in their home countries to the university and San Diego communities.

The IPJ believes that women's stories go beyond headlines to capture the nuance of complex situations and expose the realities of gender-based violence, thus providing an understanding of conflict and an avenue to its transformation. The narrative stories of Women PeaceMakers not only provide this understanding, but also show the myriad ways women construct peace in the midst of and after violence and war. For the realization of peace with justice, the voices of women – those severely affected by violent conflict and struggling courageously and creatively to build community from the devastation – must be recorded, disseminated and spotlighted.[1]

BIOGRAPHY OF A WOMAN PEACEMAKER – RAYA KADYROVA

Raya Kadyrova is the president and founder of Foundation for Tolerance International (FTI), a nongovernmental organization (NGO) founded in 1998 in Kyrgyzstan that operates in the cross-border communities of the Ferghana Valley in Central Asia. Dedicated to preventing and transforming interethnic conflicts, FTI has developed a reputation as the premier NGO in its region for its ability to bring divided communities together in the spirit of peace and for its efforts to lend a voice to disenfranchised populations.

After graduating from the University of Bishkek, Kadyrova became a language instructor for the U.S. Peace Corps Volunteers in Kyrgyzstan and later joined the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to implement a tolerance education project, minimizing tensions between Kyrgyz and Tajik students. During incursions into southern Kyrgyzstan by Islamic extremists in 1999 and 2000, known as the Batken War, FTI established camps for internally displaced people and set up Radio Salam and *Salam Asia*, a radio station and magazine – critical outlets of information for the displaced population. For her and FTI's efforts in the Batken War, Kadyrova was conferred the title of Honorary Citizen of Batken Oblast by the government of Kyrgyzstan, the only woman among seven recipients.

Additionally, Kadyrova has strived to make police reform a priority in the country and was one of two civil society representatives in the Government Committee on Police Reform in Kyrgyzstan. She was also civil society representative in the Council on Human Rights of the Kyrgyz Republic and chaired the Civil Society Advisory Board to the United Nations, which institutionalizes cooperation channels between the United Nations and civil society and seeks to improve the efficacy of U.N. activity in Kyrgyzstan.

While FTI remains focused on its original goals of preventing violent conflict and building peace and justice throughout Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia, it has expanded its efforts from the amelioration of interethnic conflicts in the Ferghana Valley to address a broader range of conflicts, particularly between corrupt governmental authorities and the citizenry of Kyrgyzstan. Kadyrova refers to this shift as a change in focus from horizontal to vertical issues, which is the result of the changing political context within the country. Therefore, FTI has developed programs aimed at developing an effective multiparty democracy, improving the capacity of local government bodies, enhancing democratic decision making at the local level and incorporating women and youth in the peaceful democratic development of Kyrgyzstan.

In addition, FTI is responsible for the development of the Early Warning for Violence Prevention program, which utilizes constant monitoring processes to raise awareness of potential and actual conflicts throughout Kyrgyzstan; it is the first early warning system in Central Asia. In 2005, Kadyrova was one of the 1,000 women nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

"If you really love your country,
if you really want the people to live in peace,
if you really care about your children and your family,
you have to do something if you see something wrong around you."
– Raya Kadyrova

NARRATIVE OF THE LIFE AND WORK OF RAYA KADYROVA OF KYRGYZSTAN

Soviet Daughter

The last in a brood of three, Raya Kadyrova was born in 1957 in the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic. But the unfettered life as the youngest child, shielded from the world of cares by two older siblings and two parents, was short-lived. Raya's parents, both teachers, would not have the joy of watching their youngest grow up to follow in their professional footsteps. When she was only 8 years old, Raya lost them both within months – first her father to high blood pressure and then her mother to heart disease.

Though now orphaned, Raya and her siblings were not without material comforts. The comforting arms of their parents were no more, but the arms of the socialist system still held them as Soviet citizens and provided a pension for such living expenses as food, clothing and transportation. Even their schooling and health care were guaranteed by the state.

But the Soviet system could only offer so much protection – it could never replace the care and nurture of a mother and a father. Without guardians, Raya quickly learned to take care of herself. At just 9 years old, she began signing her own school papers. Her class had been assigned to keep a school diary, and part of the assignment was a parent signature. Who else was going to sign her diary but Raya herself? Her teacher found the signature unacceptable, but Raya held her ground, defending her actions. "I am already orphaned," she told her teacher simply. "Who else will do it?"

She also insisted on attending parent meetings at her school. Once again, her teachers were surprised to see Raya instead of her parents. It was a simple decision: *If there is no one else to attend, I'll do it myself.* In response to her teachers' protests, Raya explained that she would miss out on updates and other important school information if nobody came to the meetings on her behalf. They had no choice but to relent to such a responsible little student, and Raya went on acting as her own guardian, signing her own papers and attending meetings, right through secondary school.

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The streak of independence that had emerged early on was not a fleeting flash. It was not surprising that Raya completed her compulsory education with the highest possible scores in four qualifying exams. Nor was it surprising that her heart was set further than university in her own Kyrgyz Republic. She was determined to attend a premier university in Moscow.

With such high marks, she eagerly expected to receive one of the 20 coveted government scholarships that were granted to each Soviet republic by the central government. But not long after her exams, Raya learned that another student had been chosen in her place. More than heart-broken, Raya was incensed. She was convinced that she deserved the scholarship – she had met all the academic qualifications and more. In the same confident and pragmatic spirit that she'd attended school meetings alongside her classmates' parents, she went immediately to the office of the Minister of Education. But Raya was no longer 9. She was 16 years old, and ready to appeal her case.

She hadn't bothered to call or make an appointment. She simply walked in and demanded that the secretary let her see the minister. But the secretary refused to let her in. "The minister is busy." What place did a protesting teenager have in a government decision? Raya could see it in the secretary's eyes: *What business do you have discussing personal matters with a high-ranking government official?*

Raya was undeterred. She told the secretary she would wait. She would not leave the office until the minister had a spare moment. Raya knew this would be her only opportunity to plead her case, so as she waited she planned what she would say. The secretary's glances did not shake her resolve, and after several hours she won her audience with the official.

Raya made an impassioned presentation to the minister. This was her chance. She showed him her credentials, proof that she was more deserving than the girl who'd been chosen. "The situation is out of my hands," he told Raya. "There is nothing I can do." Extraordinary factors had led to the decision. And, she learned, extraordinary meant the daughter of a senior government official – the deciding factor. But all was not lost. Raya's determination and academic prowess so impressed the minister that he promised to reserve a space for her the following year. It was a glimmer of possibility, enough to assuage her feelings, so Raya accepted his offer. She left the office with her promise, holding it close and deferring university and Moscow one year later in her dreams.

But a few months after Raya's plea and the minister's pledge, he was removed from office – and his promise went with him. Raya released her grasp on the promise of Moscow and enrolled instead in the state university in Bishkek, the Kyrgyz capital. Now an adult, she no longer received a pension from the state. The protective Soviet arms still offered her a small stipend that covered her tuition fees, but books, food and clothing would have to be funded another way.

Committed to her education, Raya wanted to be a traditional student, taking classes during the day. But that meant the school prohibited her from holding an outside job; only part-time students enrolled in evening classes could work during the day. Night classes, Raya thought, were not the proper way to study. So, a good seamstress, Raya began sewing clothing for other students, an unofficial job that the school could not forbid. There was still the question of payment though. Since taking cash payments was considered vulgar in Soviet culture – and a practice Raya was uncomfortable with as well – she decided to accept in-kind donations. If a student asked her to sew a skirt, Raya would tell the girl she needed 1.4 meters to make the skirt, but the payment for her sewing service would be 2.8 meters of fabric. The extra 1.4 meters became Raya's profit.

While Raya had to work hard – studying and sewing, sewing and studying – through university without her pension, she was still grateful to the state. She and her siblings had still been able to enjoy the pleasures of life. All three were given a good education and graduated from university. Raya went to summer camps and even traveled to Moscow, getting a glimpse of the promise she'd had to let go. At least she and her siblings had not been orphaned by the state as well.

The General Secretary

Raya's teaching degree was the first, but not the last, of her steps that resembled the life of her parents. She became a university professor and, not long after, met and married a fellow professor, Almaz Kadyrov. Two teachers, husband and wife. Raya took his name, and their family eventually grew to include two children, Nurlan and Aijan. But there was something different about the Kadyrov marriage. Unlike most men in Kyrgyzstan, Almaz encouraged his wife's talents and dreams. He knew they extended beyond the walls of their home.

"Carve a career for yourself while I work to feed the family," he would tell her. After seven years at the university, Raya was asked to join the Communist Party, an invitation she was honored to accept. She proudly considered herself a professional Communist Party worker. She believed in her work and was very attracted to the ideology communism had ingrained in her of justice, equality and brotherhood. Raya also knew that members of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union had more opportunities to establish their professional career. If she wanted to earn promotions or become the head of an organization, working hard and proving herself would certainly help, but so would being a party member.

Rather than becoming jealous of his wife's accomplishments, Almaz celebrated her. "Here comes the general secretary!" he would tease. In Kyrgyz culture, Almaz was something of an exception. Prominent positions were for men, not women. And in the hierarchy of the Soviet Union, the general secretary was the highest position. As Raya rose through the ranks, however, she began questioning certain practices or ideas that seemed hypocritical of communist tenets. The veneer of order and fairness began to fade. In the educational system, she watched as students who did not even take the entrance examinations were accepted into the university because of "connections" – similar to the "extraordinary factors" that had once been described to her by the Minister of Education.

Raya also grew frustrated with the quality of products sold within the Soviet Union, but that was just the surface of the frustration. The questions ran deeper. *If this country is the best one, then why are our products of bad quality?* she wondered. Everyone criticized the outside world as capitalist, which meant bad, but Raya noticed that the Soviets themselves – especially those in prominent positions – bought products from those countries. It didn't make sense. *If we are so good, then why do we not wear our own clothes and eat our own food? Why do we have to buy something foreign?*

When Mikhail Gorbachev[2] instituted his policy of *perestroika*, or economic restructuring, things seemed to get worse. Raya would walk into a store, only to find the shelves either completely empty or full only of one product that no one needed. When Raya had guests or visited a friend, one of the common jokes was sure to come up. The hostess would ask, "Would you like to wash your hands with soap?" And if the guest said yes, the hostess would reply, "Then you can have your tea, but without sugar. You cannot have both." But the jokes were only a mask for the uncertainty.

As Gorbachev encouraged more openness and citizens were able to travel abroad more, glimpses of the outside world crept into the communist society. Friends returned with fascinating stories about the quality, diversity and selection of shoes in Italy, and even more unbelievable:

racially integrated schools in America. When she first heard the stories from abroad, Raya did not believe them. It was hard for her to consider that perhaps the ideas of communism were not the best – she had no other values or systems to compare them to. But, she decided, it was good for people to visit each other, to see with their own eyes and decide for themselves.

The questions in Raya's own mind seemed to be in sync with the movement of history when, in 1991, the Soviet Union dissolved.[3] In many ways, Raya celebrated the fall of the empire, but she was also concerned about the future of her children, who no longer had the safety net that Raya had as a child. If something happened to her and her children became orphaned, what would they do? Raya feared her daughter would not be able to survive as Raya had.

The Soviet Union hadn't fallen alone. It took the long-relied upon protections of social security and state-funded education and health care with it. And it left newborn republics to navigate unfamiliar new mantles of sovereignty – and responsibility. Decisions that had always been made far away in Moscow were now transferred to the unpracticed republics themselves.

Maps of Truth

The end of the Soviet Union, beyond eliminating the socialist system that protected its citizens in many ways, also had wide-ranging implications on the demarcation of borders of the former republics, including Kyrgyzstan. When the republics were all part of the Soviet Union, borders meant little. Though each country had its own version of the borders that defined its territory, borders were fluid and free-flowing. Raya could easily travel to other parts of the Soviet Union without a visa or the burdens of a complex immigration system or strict border guards. So the fact that one country's map of truth disputed its neighbor's was of little consequence.

The ambiguity and openness of borders was an especially important factor for life in areas like the Ferghana Valley, which intersects the three republics of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The populous valley is home to multiple rich resources as well as multiple ethnic groups, and the porous borders had made trade simple and ensured the economic survival of these groups. But when the republics were broken up into their own countries, maps became much more important. It mattered whose was correct.

Ethnicity took on new meaning with the solidifying of borders. Ethnic groups – Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Tajik – that had once intermingled, moved back and forth and generally populated the Ferghana Valley now had specific nations ascribed to their ethnicity. But many groups were not included in their new nation, and a large Uzbek population remained in Kyrgyzstan. New borders also created enclaves, or isolated pockets of territory within another country, which were sprinkled throughout the valley. Curtailed travel lessened the interaction between people who, though they differed in ethnicity, once had a culture that was very much shared. With new borders came the seed of new tensions and stereotypes.

As lines between countries were drawn, each country wanted their preferred map to be reflected. In some cases, the newly drawn lines split up villages – half the village in one country, half in another. Neighbors whose houses had stood side by side for decades now had barbed wire running between them: An international border. Authorities even discovered one home perfectly straddling Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. The main house was in one country while the toilet – often outside the house – was now in a different country. But borders through villages didn't just separate neighbors. They separated school children from the one school in the village and sick people from the only clinic. People on the wrong side of the border lost access to the village market and had nowhere to sell their goods or buy their necessities.

The new borders halted economies as well. Markets and economies dipped, as long-established trade routes that crossed borders were no longer reliable. And resources that had once been subsidized and centrally controlled by the Soviet government and shared among the republics now belonged to whoever owned the territory that provided it. Subsidized energy stopped flowing from Moscow and the new keepers of resources – land, water, oil – began privatizing the resources within their territory that could bolster their economy. Kyrgyzstan had water and Uzbekistan had gas, but each was still dependent on the other to share the scarce resources.

And just as resources had been distributed from Moscow to the republics, so had the markets of each republic been funneled back toward Moscow to the benefit of the Soviet Union. But now Kyrgyzstan and the other new nations had to compete in the global world of commerce – unfamiliar ground.

Many years earlier, during the days of the Soviet Union, Raya's father-in-law had set aside a small bundle of money, which at the time had been enough to buy a decent one-bedroom apartment. After perestroika, that bundle was only worth a cow. And now, what could once secure a roof over his head could only purchase a hat to cover his head. What once had been certain under Soviet systems had crumbled and needed to be recreated. Though now independent, Kyrgyzstan was poor and struggling in its youth.

Changing Course

Though the Soviet Union had dissolved, Raya still had a teaching position in Bishkek. But in March 1994, Raya spent two months in the hospital after a delicate surgery for her weak heart condition. The surgery and her leave from work were only the beginning of change in her professional life. Raya had been out of the hospital for just four days when she received the phone call from her friend: Would she be interested in working for the Peace Corps? The person hired for the job had backed out, and they needed someone immediately. The phone had rung in the afternoon, she was interviewed the same evening and the next day, still recuperating from her surgery, Raya left Bishkek.

Raya became a language instructor for Peace Corps volunteers newly arrived in the country. As part of their pre-service training, Raya taught them Kyrgyz and Russian from May to August. So Raya, one of the first instructors to train the American volunteers in both languages, bestowed her knowledge of the local languages to fresh volunteers during the summer and continued her old job of tutoring in Bishkek for the rest of the year.

The next year, while still teaching Kyrgyz and Russian, Raya also became the Peace Corps cross-cultural coordinator in Kyrgyzstan. Near the end of her second summer, one of the volunteers asked her about the refugee situation in Kyrgyzstan. Raya knew that the influx of refugees into southern Kyrgyzstan was the ripple effect of the civil war in neighboring Tajikistan – and that it was already a difficult time in her country. Extreme poverty and high unemployment plagued Kyrgyzstan. Electricity and public transportation were unreliable and not widely available. An increased population couldn't be helping.

But Raya decided to invite an expert to come speak to her language students about the refugee situation. When Helmut Buss, the head of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Liaison Office in Kyrgyzstan, came and made his presentation, the Peace Corps volunteers weren't the only ones learning. Raya was surprised to learn that the refugees streaming down from the mountains of Tajikistan were actually ethnic Kyrgyz who had made Tajikistan their home years ago. Raya asked question after question of Helmut. She hadn't realized just how many refugees had settled in the border regions – nearly 45,000. In a small country of 5 million, still trying to find its post-Soviet footing, that was significant.

Raya also hadn't known of all the problems resulting from the refugee situation. The already severe competition for resources was being intensified by the additional refugee population in the border areas of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Tensions between local communities and the refugees were building, sometimes becoming violent.

Though Helmut's presentation was meant to instruct her foreign volunteers, Raya had learned that there was more to the refugees pouring across the border than she had known. Something was going wrong, with no inclination of getting better.

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Helmut must have been struck by Raya's intent and persistent questioning during his presentation, because a few months later he invited her to join UNHCR – to help where she'd learned something was wrong. But she didn't want to stop working for the Peace Corps during the summer months. Her work as the cross-cultural coordinator was continually enriching. Before she began working with the volunteers, she'd been unaware of the stereotypes that had been nurtured and carried from her Soviet past. But those had been broken down over the past year.

Raya agreed to start working with UNHCR, but only on the condition that she could still work with the Peace Corps in the summer. With the start of a new year, 1996, Raya embarked on her new teaching role with UNHCR, and the realization of her own stereotypes ended up being the perfect primer for her new task: teaching Kyrgyz and Tajik youth about tolerance. Raya would also train the teachers so the tolerance education could continue without UNHCR's presence. Hopefully some progress would be made through the educational system, and teachers and students could carry tolerance and peaceful resolution of conflict into their community.

Most of the refugees that had poured into Kyrgyzstan had settled in the southern part of the country, already the more underdeveloped and economically weak part of Kyrgyzstan. And as the refugee population continued to rise, so did the strain and hostility between Kyrgyz locals and Tajik refugees. It was in this cross-border region where Raya and UNHCR would first implement the Tolerance Education Project. Raya remembered that when she was young, Tajiks, Kyrgyz and Uzbeks treated each other with more hospitality. There was a feeling of sisterhood and brotherhood. But she feared for that legacy in the young people she worked with. Living after the birth of borders, visas and harsh border guards, they no longer knew the culture of sister and brother.

For her first two years with UNHCR, Raya worked without an outline of duties or any official job description. She just kept working, developing the training from Bishkek with the hope that it was creating more peaceful, tolerant communities in the south. One of the project's activities was a conflict-settling contest for teenagers. The teenagers – both refugees and Kyrgyz citizens – wrote stories about conflicts in their own lives and how they might resolve them, and their stories were eventually published in five Central Asian languages.

Though she was working hard and the Tolerance Education Project was progressing, Raya was beginning to notice that the project had some inherent limitations. The trainings weren't informed by visiting communities first to find out what they needed – it was all just based on books they had read. But the more Raya actually visited the communities and understood what was happening, the more she felt that the classrooms were becoming too narrow. *It's not just the school students and teachers who need skills of tolerance and conflict resolution,* she thought. In fact, the more she thought about it, the more she realized: A school is a very structured context. When there are conflicts, it is immediately visible. If a fight breaks out between two teenagers in the schoolyard, a principal or a teacher will find out quickly and help resolve the conflict.

But, Raya wondered, *what about the real conflicts?* Thoughts of expansion pulled and played at the edges of her mind, a disturbing, restless feeling that wouldn't let her go. It was important to teach the children, but the Tolerance Project needed to move outside the walls of the schools to the

streets of the communities. That's where the real conflicts were happening, and there was no one like a principal responsible for resolving those conflicts.

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Raya kept a close watch on stories of disputes that ran in the newspapers – she wanted to connect their training to real life, what people were really experiencing. The stories she read painted a picture of volatility and instability. Raya knew the dynamics of the conflicts in her country, and she knew they were growing and boiling, desperate to be addressed.

The intersection of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan in the Ferghana Valley had been considered the breadbasket of the USSR, full of the most arable land and brimming with fruits, vegetables and grains, grazing cows and sheep. But treasure invites competition, and the countries that shared the valley all wanted and needed its resources. So the cross-border conflicts that permeated the communities had to do with resource distribution, but they were also connected to historical claims to disputed lands. And historical claims were linked to ethnicity, so ethnic tensions contributed to the complex, combustible mix.

Regions all across Kyrgyzstan remained contested, especially in relation to Uzbekistan. During the Soviet era, there had been essentially no conflict between the Uzbeks and Kyrgyz living in Ferghana Valley. In the Kyrgyz part of the valley, Uzbeks lived side by side with Kyrgyz, most of them working in Soviet-operated plants and factories. But when perestroika brought about the collapse of the economy, ethnic Kyrgyz realized they had no land possessions to fall back on. They started to question the Kyrgyz land being occupied by Uzbeks, so officials reapportioned pieces of government land to Kyrgyz families, not necessarily to the citizens of Kyrgyzstan. The battle for land around the Kyrgyz city of Osh erupted into a bloody confrontation between ethnic Uzbeks and ethnic Kyrgyz. And the memory of that recent violence had not yet faded from relations between the groups.

Because the issues were so multifaceted and widespread, Raya knew that if their efforts for tolerance and peaceful conflict resolution were going to be effective, they needed the whole community. They needed to work with the teenagers, but also with the older youth who couldn't go to university and had nothing to do. They needed the policemen, the women, the community leaders and the ***aksakals*** – the white-bearded wise men. But whenever Raya would suggest taking their program outside the schools, she was told the program was only for the students and teachers, not the community. The funding was for curriculum and national education; it could not be redirected. And a separate training was out of the question. There were no funds for a community program.

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Raya was frustrated. She had ideas for projects and programs that would respond to the problems she saw, but she just kept hearing no. She didn't understand all of the bureaucracy behind the repeated no's. And when she went to her first official training in Bishkek with UNHCR partners in other countries like Azerbaijan and Armenia, it was like learning an entirely new language. Raya felt miserable as the people around her spoke of their "beneficiaries" and "constituencies," or how

they were working on "monitoring" and "stakeholder analysis." *What were they talking about?* She couldn't understand anything that was being discussed.

For two days, Raya tried to follow along, holding in the stress of feeling like such a foreigner. Ashamed that Helmut might realize for the first time how little she knew, Raya finally asked him to explain one thing: What did the word monitoring mean? He did his best to explain it to her in English. "Oh, I understand," Raya said. "It's control."

"No, not control," he said. Raya nodded, but she still didn't fully grasp the meaning of the word. *At least I know it's not the same as control,* she thought.

Once she got past the puzzle of all the new vocabulary, Raya began to pick up on a few things. They had been using the Soviet system, just fluffing up their training with modern words like tolerance, democracy, participation and transparency without really understanding what it all meant. *We're just playing games with these new words,* Raya thought.

Raya had started the training days feeling incredibly incompetent, lacking in the knowledge to do this work, but by the end she'd learned something: There were different ways to do the same job. People could be trained and know all the scientific words but be unsuccessful, ineffective and inefficient. Or they could be like her: succeeding without knowing any theory. She realized that what she lacked in theoretical background, she made up for in experience and dedication. She had been working based on her own intuition. And it was her intuition that was telling her to go further.

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Despite Raya's determination and intuition, it didn't seem she had the power to alter the Tolerance Project to include the community, or to create a new project. She felt like a dog on a chain – and the chain was tied to Bishkek. She needed to be in the southern part of Kyrgyzstan, where the conflict and need was. Her office needed to be there, not far away in the capital. She wanted to see tangible results, like water provision and school buildings where children could study in their own language.

She needed to be free from the chain. She wanted to institute change, at any time, as the need arose. She wanted to open offices and hire staff in the places where the work needed to be done. Raya had done all she could within UNHCR's project stipulations, but her intuition told her: She needed to be free to see something wrong and do what she thought might make it better.

"Why don't you start your own NGO?" A conversation from a few years ago kept coming back to Raya. Nudging her. Suggesting. It was in one of her Peace Corps volunteer training sessions that another coordinator – an American – had told her, "Just establish your teachers association and then you can attend trainings and conferences." But Raya knew that cost money. She had listened, but inside she had said to herself, *These Americans have been here for four months already, yet they still do not understand that our people have no money.* The idea had been nearly impossible to Raya. She had no resources, but that was the first time she'd heard the word "donor" – people and groups actually willing to fund organizations.

The thought of forming her own organization, one where she was free to respond to the problems she saw, had been eating at her. Bit by bit. She watched as her colleagues working for other NGOs saw a problem, had an idea and could immediately do something about it. She thought about it every night before she fell asleep. For half an hour, she'd lie awake looking at the ceiling, imagining and wondering.

It was simple: Find a donor who will fund the implementation of a project that will solve a particular problem. She couldn't do it through the government. The government didn't have any money, but it was more than that. Raya knew the government wouldn't accept a project about conflict – that would be an acknowledgment that there were ethnic conflicts and that the government was too weak to address them.

One night she decided: *I just have to try.*

A Foundation for Tolerance

Raya left UNHCR in early 1998, but it was UNHCR that agreed to initially fund Raya's new organization for its first year. As she applied to establish her own organization, Raya felt both thrill and fear. *What would happen after one year? How would this continue?*

Foundation for Tolerance International (FTI) was officially registered by March and took over the Tolerance Education Project from UNHCR. But now Raya was able to expand it to fit her dream of including and responding to other groups in conflicted communities. Raya now had an organization, a funder, a project, four staff members and freedom. But part of her still felt she was starting from zero. They had no official literature on conflict theories – and especially nothing about managing conflict in their region. If there was material, it was always in English and about an American or European conflict.

Part of the reason it was so hard to find official analysis of the conflict was because the situation was always changing – and changing quickly. There was always so much to learn and not much time to learn it. As Raya would explain to people, the conflicts in the Central Asian region were international and interconnected. If someone had studied ethnic tension and felt they knew how to deal with it, the next minute they would find that a situation they thought was about ethnic tension was actually about something else.

But Raya had lived her whole life in Kyrgyzstan. She had her intuition. And she had her determination. She knew the tension and violence in the communities did not stem from one source – and she knew that to prevent and transform the conflicts, she would need the community. And it couldn't be run from Bishkek. Raya wanted to find out what the people thought the solutions for peace and tolerance were and then support those solutions.

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The women were Raya's first priority. They were one of the main groups in the communities that she had seen excluded and wanted to reach. Not all of the tensions were between ethnic groups. Some were simply between husbands and wives. Raya had a husband who valued her as an equal, called her the General Secretary – but Raya's was not representative of most women's lives in Kyrgyzstan, especially southern Kyrgyzstan where FTI was first focusing its attention. Life there was more traditional and thus offered less freedom to women. But despite their relative majority in society, women's voices were in the minority of those heard.

When Raya first brought FTI to the southern part of Kyrgyzstan, only men would attend the public forums. To talk to the women, Raya held separate meetings and visited them in their homes. It wasn't that the women had nothing to say – they were just unaccustomed to speaking out in front of the men, who were used to being heard and respected. Though the women did not always articulate their ideas as strongly if men were around, among themselves they had plenty to say about the hardships they faced.

Unfortunately, village decisions that would directly affect the women were made at the public meetings. The problems discussed were usually the ones the men perceived to be the most pressing, and the solutions tended to weigh in their favor. If the topic was water supply and usage, the conversation would focus on irrigation for crops, but leave out the ways that women needed water to take care of their families.

So Raya decided that FTI would begin a new training – for the women. She began training women in self-esteem, leadership and management, but she knew it had to go further. *These women are real leaders,* Raya thought when she looked at them. *And real leaders should be doing something.* Raya had always believed that trainings had to be part of something bigger – something practical. The skills the women were learning should be applied to something real in their lives.

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Ever since the borders had been drawn, border conflict had existed. But it had been increasing. In 1998, Uzbekistan imposed a new visa law that prohibited Kyrgyz citizens from traveling more than 100 kilometers into Uzbekistan without a visa. Kyrgyzstan soon retaliated with its own similar law. Trade and social patterns that had already been altered were further disrupted. People living in the Kyrgyz city of Osh, only 5 kilometers from Uzbekistan, first had to go all the way north to Bishkek for a visa. Then, beginning in 1999, the Uzbek government intensified its border controls, installing minefields all along unclear or disputed borders with neighboring Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.[4]

Raya now needed a visa to visit projects that FTI was starting in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Even if she was only visiting the Sokh enclave, which was in Kyrgyzstan but governed by Uzbekistan and populated by ethnic Tajiks, she still needed a visa. The entire perimeter of Sokh had been mined by Uzbekistan to ensure that people crossed at the checkpoints. Though the government had posted warning signs, Kyrgyz still complained of safety. After all, their livestock couldn't read the signs. As governments grew more concerned with monitoring their borders, ordinary citizens – travelers and traders – were exposed to more danger, inconvenience, harassment and brutality. And for border communities, it was an everyday reality.

Extortion and bribery were especially common and entrepreneurial border officials thrived in ambiguous and unclear border areas. Local communities were easy prey for border guards who could apply laws at their own whim. Many of the women who had come to Raya's trainings had to cross the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border every day to sell their products in markets. Their sales were considered an underground market, so they were at the mercy of the border guards' corruption. If asked for a bribe, the women either paid it or went home without selling anything.

When the group of women decided they wanted to do something about the bribery, Raya filled with pride. It was her hope that communities would initiate their own projects, especially the women whose confidence and leadership she had been grooming. The women designed a plan to survey bribery and corruption along the borders they crossed. Their disguise was simple. For most of them it was their own daily activity: They posed as sellers who needed to cross the border to market their wares. But now they were incognito. They were the ones in power, documenting the

actions of the customs officers. As they played themselves, the women recorded the number of times they were bribed. And the officers knew nothing of their investigation.

One day, resting after a morning hard at work on their secret mission, the women noticed a man selling watermelons near the border. "What are you doing in this area?" he asked when they walked over to buy some of his fruit. He seemed surprised to see so many women near the border crossing. It certainly was not the safest place for them to spend the afternoon. He looked trustworthy, so the women told him: *Documenting how many times we are asked to pay a bribe.* A border-crossing salesman himself, the man was thrilled to learn about their project. He had many times been a victim of corrupt border officials. The watermelon salesman encouraged them to continue their work, and, as a reward for their noble action, he told them to take as many watermelons as they wanted.

The women went home that day with watermelons for their families and the pride of receiving a man's gratitude and applause. They were emboldened, and when Raya heard their story, she knew she was listening to the leaders she had seen when she first met the women.

Theory Meets Reality

It's hard to pinpoint the exact moment when change occurs. Was it the accumulation of all the moments of the three short, tumultuous months that Raya found herself and her organization in the midst of a small-scale war? Or, was it the moment of the invitation that led them there?

Rahat Adyrova, a female member of Kyrgyzstan's parliament, was considered a national success story in her rise to political prominence in the still largely traditional culture, so when she asked Raya to present on FTI's work, Raya was honored – both at the invitation and that Rahat knew of her organization. After Raya's presentation, Rahat made her own, discussing the increasingly dire situation in her home region, Batken Oblast.[5]

Batken, she said, was one of Kyrgyzstan's poorest and least developed regions – the worst social and economic conditions in the country. And it was isolated. Batken, along with its neighboring Leilek district, was like a southwestern Kyrgyz peninsula jutting into the sea of Tajikistan. The closest cities to Batken were in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, which meant access to needed goods and the ability to sell goods and make a living were completely dictated by the current state of political and border tensions.

Raya was even more honored when Rahat invited her to visit and see the situation for herself. Raya met with the *akims*, or local governors, of Batken and Leilek to propose setting up FTI field offices in each of their districts to work on conflict prevention. Both areas were particularly susceptible to breakouts of violence and confrontation because of their geography. Unrest in Afghanistan, and the guerillas fighting there, was not far away. Numerous border crossings and enclaves made the region a haven for different rebel and militant groups moving from one area to another.

The Leilek akim was immediately enthusiastic. FTI quickly established an office there and was easily accepted and integrated into the community because of the akim's support. But the Batken akim was more skeptical. NGOs were not widely understood in the region. *What is an NGO?* people would ask. *Are you spies? Who gives you your money? Why?* The Batken field office took much longer, but eventually the akim was convinced. Raya's organization could now work in two communities directly with the people – instead of from Bishkek.

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But just as the new office in Batken was opening its doors, the first incursions began. Rebels from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) were moving from Tajikistan through Kyrgyzstan into Uzbek territory in the Ferghana Valley, which included the scattered islands of Uzbek enclaves throughout Kyrgyzstan. The IMU had been growing and training in Tajikistan, sparked in 1991 by the refusal of an Uzbek mayor to give land for a mosque. An angry splinter group then formed when the Islamic Renaissance Party refused to demand a Muslim state.

Now that group had mobilized and Batken was their staging ground en route to Uzbekistan. Raya's new FTI office had planned to be a source for conflict prevention, but it quickly became clear that prevention had been needed earlier. Now it was time to respond however they were needed.

On Aug. 16, 1999, Kyrgyz President Askar Akayev addressed the nation on TV, explaining that there was heavy fighting between the insurgents and government forces in Batken Oblast. But Raya and her new office did not leave. Working amid the sounds of bullets and bombs, Raya and FTI helped set up camps for all the people being displaced from their homes as their villages were transformed into battlegrounds. It was chaos. Nobody knew what to do. Raya had never expected FTI to be working with internally displaced persons, but the fighting continued, displacing more and more people.

Nearly 5,000 people fled their homes in search of safety. The rebels had snipers and mortars; Uzbekistan had deployed airstrikes against the rebels, killing 12 Kyrgyz citizens. And most of the villagers left their homes frantically as they heard the gunfire, taking nothing with them. When they reached the camps, Raya and other FTI staff helped them figure out papers, documents, visas – many had left everything behind.

FTI wasn't the only one helping, but they were the only local organization that stayed and operated under the unstable and dangerous conditions. United Nations organizations like UNICEF were also there and put FTI in charge of monitoring the distribution of aid. It had been disappearing, and they suspected pilfering. Raya began tracking the aid more closely and soon discovered that there was indeed theft – and some of it was being committed by officials themselves. She created a report of the abuses of power, with all the stealing in detail, and submitted it to the local akim. But instead of showing gratitude for her service and disciplining the officials, he called in his deputy and ordered her thrown out – with police force if necessary.

But sometimes those in power did listen to her. Word had spread that the rebels were heading up into the remote mountains, and Raya knew the villagers would be caught off guard, defenseless and vulnerable. She persuaded the government to send two helicopters up into the mountains to rescue the potential victims of the approaching militants. The helicopters evacuated about 100 villagers from the mountains – and the people's report was that those lives had been saved by Raya.

The violence and chaos continued through August and into September, a summer incursion that was termed the "Small Batken War." But for the people who had been uprooted, and even for those whose villages had been skipped over, it was nothing small. The fear was still there, even though the bullets and bombs had hushed. For a time.

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This, the people worried, would not be the last incursion. The wave of violence had left behind anxious nerves and, simultaneously, both a distrust of Islam and a rise in learning the Quran. But people were studying the Quran for different reasons. For some, the aggression of the rebels, although executed in the name of religion, did represent a more widespread dissatisfaction. Where

social and political conditions are unstable and unemployment high, religious extremism had more likelihood to flourish. And, with the Ferghana Valley's pre-existing tensions between three major ethnic groups, conditions were ripe for the cultivation of extremism and militancy.

But others were busily memorizing the Quran for another reason: protection. The IMU rebels were known to be funded by drug trafficking and kidnapping ransoms, and during the summer they had taken hostages as part of their warfare. Many were local villagers – and several were Japanese, American and German citizens – but only those who knew the Quran by heart were released. So Raya and her assistants, who traveled in the mountainous regions where the kidnapping had occurred, memorized the Quran. It was the only way to ensure that if they were ambushed and taken hostage, they would have a chance of survival. Even small children, under their parents' orders, were studying the Quran for safety.

Raya's intent was not to instill fear though. While violent religious militants were spreading one brand of Islam throughout the region, Raya did not want one conflict to create misunderstanding, intolerance and possibly more conflict. The summer had convinced many people that Muslims were simply bad. Raya wanted to remind the communities that Islam, true Islam, was not equivalent to violence or hatred. She brought in respected religious leaders to talk to the people – some nervous, some angry – and counter the violent Islamic propaganda they had witnessed throughout the summer. Islam, as with any religion or idea, could be taken to an extremity of violence.

Raya knew that the Quran addressed concerns of ordinary people, like brotherhood and mutual support. She also knew there were many who felt that the government was not addressing those concerns – and that was the kind of desperation that could be wooed, not just by the Quran, but by an extremism that was not really Islam.

Rumors and the Radio

Gunfire, mortars and the sound of aircrafts rumbling above the clouds had left the repertoire of daily life in the villages of Batken, but anxiety and fear still loomed beneath the surface. The wind of hysteria and panic could be stirred with just one suggestion, one overheard conversation. And the rumors were spreading through Batken like fire: *The guerillas are coming back next summer. The bullets and bombs will be back.*

Rumors really were like fire. The wind of hysteria and panic only fanned them, and the water that could put them out – access to true, reliable information – was something that the people of Batken didn't have. During the last summer of incursions, Raya had found that TV and radio shows were almost nonexistent. There wasn't even a newspaper for the people to find out what was going on. And if a newspaper did make its way from Bishkek to Batken, people had no money to buy one. Between a newspaper and food for the family, not many will choose the newspaper. Information cost money, so in a region with little resources there was little information.[6]

Raya had seen that a lack or manipulation of information could be a source, or at least an assisting factor, of conflict. Those with information were powerful. Those without were vulnerable. That's why FTI had started publishing its magazine *Salam Asia* – distributed through Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan – that covered the refugee situation and encouraged tolerance education. Life in the Soviet era had not been a life of transparency, and Kyrgyzstan had inherited much from that era. Information reflects the opinion of the one writing or paying for it, and that had been the Soviet government. As the saying went, "Whoever pays orders the music."

Something had to be done, especially with the next summer – and the potential of another season of incursion – approaching. Raya decided to ask the women for help. Women are listeners – if there was information to be had, they would have found it. Or at least they would know the channels it ran through. She walked through the village, talking to women in the street or outside their homes.

"Where do you hear about news?" she asked the women. "Where do you get your information? How do you know what's happening?" Woman after woman, the answer was resounding: *My husband.*

If my husband tells me, then I know.

I would know what was happening if my husband shared the information with me.

It was clear that the women – and the rest of the community – needed another news source, one with accurate information that they had independent access to. A wife's knowledge should not be dependent upon her husband's.

So Raya's second round of polling consisted of one question: "What would be the best way for you to learn information for yourself?"

The wives were busy. The wives had work to do. They didn't have a lot of leisure time. Raya received another overwhelming agreement from the women. The radio.

When I clean the house, wash linens or cut potatoes, I can still listen to the radio.

I don't need to set aside some special time just to listen to the news. I can do my work and listen to the radio.

They had radios – there was just no information coming out of the speakers. Raya had the women's opinion, and after researching and learning that radio was actually the cheapest mode of communication – and didn't rely on electricity – FTI decided to set up its own radio station. In 2000, Radio Salam aired its first broadcast in both Kyrgyz and Tajik – and it came just in time.

The next summer the rumors turned out to be true. The bullets and bombs did return, but this time Raya had the radio. The radio didn't stop the incursion. It didn't stop the camps filling again with displaced families, but it made Raya's job easier. She could communicate with more people, and at least give them the assurance of truth and knowledge.

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After the war, the Kyrgyz government bestowed the title of Honorary Citizen of Batken Oblast on seven people for their outstanding and courageous contributions to stabilization, democratization and socio-economic development in Batken. Raya was one of the seven – and the only woman.

Over the span of the two-summer "Small Batken War," Raya had found herself on many different fronts. She had seen problems and had the freedom to do something she thought might help. She and her staff learned more about the theories of conflict prevention and conflict resolution than they could have from any training or literature. In the war's aftermath, FTI started numerous projects to address the various and continued conflicts in the region. One was a community-based support center that would provide information and educate people on how to prevent and resolve conflict – and the role the community itself plays.

What had started with an invitation to visit had propelled Raya's foundation from a fledgling organization to one that had grown wise beyond its years.

The Videotape

Raya was in Bishkek when she heard that the peaceful demonstrations in Aksy District had taken a quick and deadly turn. Five protestors had been shot dead. Official reports were vague, riddled with holes, but those who had been on the road knew the real story. They'd watched the scene unfold before their eyes: the marchers blocked by policemen, the beating, the stones flying and the police opening fire. And only the witnesses knew the truth – until the videotape.

Political repression had been gradually seeping into Kyrgyz society under President Akayev. The shooting had not been the first violation of civil liberties. The demonstration itself had been in protest of another case of repression – the arrest of Azimbek Beknazarov, a member of parliament and an outspoken opponent of the Akayev administration. Political opposition and criticism was not encouraged in Akayev's Kyrgyzstan. Before the 2000 presidential elections, President Akayev's primary opponent, Feliks Kulov, had been thrown in jail as well. Kyrgyzstan had also begun to clamp down on independent Islam. Dozens of Muslims – and not the violent, insurgent type – were being arrested and jailed.

The day of the shooting, March 17, 2002, was the day of Beknazarov's trial in the city of Kerben. Several hundred of his supporters from surrounding villages had decided to walk to Kerben, carrying signs and denouncing his prosecution. The crowd of men and women, a small sea of hats and jackets, were marching down a dirt road lined with trees when they were stopped by policemen in camouflaged uniform. A standoff. A moment of confrontation before the peace turned to chaos. Police began beating the demonstrators, and when one policeman pulled a prominent human rights activist from the crowd, the people began throwing rocks, demanding he be released. And then the gunshots cut through the rising frenzy. The crowd began to scatter, people running into the trees.

But there was one policeman capturing the commotion with a video camera. And there was one woman, standing at the outskirts of the fray, who noticed the camera. Raya later heard the woman's mysterious story: that she'd heard a whisper behind her, telling her, *Get the video, get the video. Only the video can save you.* When the woman turned around, no one was there, but the words had been real enough to fill her with courage. As quickly as the whisperer had disappeared, the woman ran up to the policeman, hit him from behind and snatched the video from the camera when he fell, stunned.

Before another policeman could see it or catch her, she handed it off to another woman. The video was passed from one woman to another to mislead any attempts to retrieve it, but somehow in the growing chaos the women lost track of it – the video of truth that could save them from the version of the story that came out instead.

There was no way to cover up the five protestors lying dead on the ground. No story could deny the 29 wounded. But for two weeks, it was the filtered "official" report, with no mention of who had pulled the trigger, against the people's report. Then, just as mysterious as the whispers that the woman had heard, the videotape was recovered. And it contained the record of what really

happened on the dirt road on March 17. It was slightly fuzzy and a bit jumpy, but in black and white it held the truth: Kyrgyz policemen had shot and killed the five protestors.

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Despite the video's hard evidence, not one policeman was charged with the deaths. Neither the wounded victims nor the witnesses to the "Aksy events," as March 17 was now referred to as, were brought to the trial. In the eyes of the citizens of Aksy District, it was not only the police officers whose image was marred. The people's severe distrust in law enforcement now extended to the entire court system. The ones who were supposed to protect the people had harmed them. And those responsible for distributing justice had turned away.

Police became the despised and common enemy of the people in the villages around Kerben. From March until August, some villages did not allow a single police officer to enter their community to return to their jobs. In response to the aggression of the people, many policemen simply left their jobs. If a relative worked for the Kerben police, it was seen as a shame to the family, who prohibited them from wearing their uniform.

To fill the growing void in law enforcement, the government transferred new policemen from other districts to Aksy, in hopes of solving the problem. But it only made the situation worse. The new police had been transferred either because they were young and inexperienced or because they were incompetent, so the villages decided to solve the problem themselves by establishing their own independent "people's police union." The people claimed great success and a sharp decrease in crimes, but the Aksy District head of police said that crimes were still happening – they were just being hidden to prove that the "people's police union" was more effective than official police officers.

The retaliation was spiraling downward, not quite yet out of control. But because Kerben was so close to the border with Uzbekistan, it was already prone to conflict. Raya had been following the Aksy events and the conflict of the people versus the police, and she could see that the environment of distrust had serious potential for escalation. Raya wanted to minimize that potential. The community and the police needed to talk to each other, so Raya decided that FTI would try to facilitate a dialogue between them – help them negotiate how they would continue to live together. FTI had expanded its conflict work to include mediation, and though they usually focused on tension between cross-border communities, the same could be applied to the problems between the police and the people.

From the different community conflicts she had seen, Raya had learned that people first needed to learn to analyze the situation so they could identify the real problem. And then they needed to discuss the problem with other members in the community. So, when she gathered the people for the community negotiation – the police, the villagers, those who had been there on March 17, those who had known one of the five demonstrators – Raya instructed them: ***Refrain from blaming others. Focus on solutions.*** Community dialogues could easily turn into shouting matches or a catch-all for everyone's concerns, so Raya also taught communities not to bring all their problems into one conversation. Too many problems confused and complicated the discussion.

The solution was not as simple as one dialogue on one day. Raya wanted FTI's facilitation to have long-term benefits for the community. A dialogue, a real negotiation, was an ongoing activity. She wanted to establish communication channels between ordinary citizens and local government, and to teach law enforcement how to prevent and resolve conflicts non-violently. And, in an effort to increase people's knowledge and revive confidence in their own laws and rights, FTI also arranged for consultations with lawyers and law enforcement officials in the community – and even in people's homes.

The dialogues were, in a way, like Salam Radio. Raya wanted to create an environment for the people to be able to discuss issues, make their own informed decisions and draw their own conclusions. The people and the police talking directly to each other – in a circle, in the same room – provided each group with shared true information, reducing the rumors and hearsay that only inflamed each side. Truth and understanding could go a long way.

From the Trees to the Forest

There is a difference between the trees and the forest. There are many connections between the two, and of course the forest would not exist without all the trees. And each tree is significant – worthy of individual attention – but the trees are also part of something bigger. If you forget to look up and around, you might miss the forest. And the forest is important.

It started to become evident to Raya that seeing one problem in one particular area and creating a project to resolve it was not the whole of the work needed. In the beginning, Raya and FTI had focused on starting development projects, always in response to emergency situations that sprung up in cross-border areas. But that experience, watching the same problem surface again and again, had taught Raya that they needed to go deeper and wider – a more in-depth approach to the entire conflict, both in Kyrgyzstan and the whole of Central Asia. Everything was interconnected. Raya realized that, in their zeal, FTI had perhaps been mistaking the trees for the forest.

One of those trees was the mismanagement of water in the Ferghana Valley – a problem and source of conflict that Raya had been working on for years. But it was still a problem because, Raya realized, it was not the heart of the problem. It was a resource issue, but resource issues were really, at the root, political issues. Larger systems and structures needed to be changed. *We need to see the whole forest*, Raya thought.

Raya began to revision what FTI's role in the community – be it a village, Kyrgyzstan or Central Asia – should look like. They could not just be a reactive organization anymore. Long-term solutions required getting to the root of the problem. Their role, Raya decided, had to be in changing people's way of thinking – a permanent change – rather than just implementing projects. Another piece of vocabulary that Raya had picked up in the language of NGOs was "programmatic approach." A new programmatic vision needed to ask a new question. The question should not be if one particular local problem has been solved – one tree. But, have the mindsets, structures and mechanisms been created that will prevent future conflicts? That was the forest. Programs looked at the forest. Projects looked at the trees.

Things had happened so fast for Raya and FTI – because that's what the situation had demanded. Need after need had arisen, and they kept responding. In its first five years, FTI grew from its original four staff members to a 58-member organization. It expanded outside the borders of Kyrgyzstan as well, to five Central Asian countries with five field offices covering four cross-border areas. What began by running UNHCR's Tolerance Education Project was now overseeing 14 international long-term projects.[7] There had hardly been time to look up and see the forest.

Even after FTI shifted to a more holistic approach, Raya did not stop noticing the trees. Kyrgyzstan was still vastly poor, and there was still a need for direct responses to people's needs before the next step could be taken. Raya's vision for FTI included one more important role: that eventually they would no longer be needed. When Raya brought people together to discuss problems in the community, she asked them: "What are the reasons for these problems? How can they be solved? And who will solve them?"

The answer was not the officials or the governor. It was not the president. It was them, the community – they were responsible for finding the solutions to their problems. And when the time came that the people could resolve their problems on their own, that is when FTI would leave. Raya wanted the communities to do what she had always believed herself: If you really love your country, if you really want the people to live in peace, if you really care about your children and your family, you have to do something if you see something wrong around you.

In Kyrgyzstan's ever-changing terrain of conflict and Raya's search for lasting peace, her own central tenet has remained the same. You have to do something if you see something wrong.

A CONVERSATION WITH RAYA KADYROVA

The following is an edited compilation of select interviews conducted by Yasmin Gatal-Hashimoto between Sept. 29 and Dec. 5, 2003.

Q: What is the perception of NGOs in Kyrgyzstan?

A: During the Batken incursion, we were planning to work there as a conflict prevention organization but then suddenly the incursion happened. We became people who had to disseminate information about the role of civil society, the role of international donors and so on. We spent 60 percent of our time explaining who we were. Because in that region, nobody knew what an NGO was.

We did not give a sophisticated explanation. We said that an NGO is an organization that is independent from the government, in terms of finances, decision-making, etcetera. We explained that we as an NGO were there not to implement water projects. We said this is the role of the government, but we do it because the government cannot do it now.

We also explained that it was important that NGOs were not in opposition to the government. We explained that the government now is very weak and we understand – there was lack of finances and lack of experience in governing an independent state. Because of that, our officials were not able to cover all the needs of our people. In a new democratic environment, NGOs are there to cover these gaps, to have the niche which the government cannot cover.

That was a very important message because the first NGOs were about human rights. Of course they somehow had tension with their officials, but we would like to really establish collaboration between the population and the officials because without this kind of collaboration, you are not efficient in your work. So that was one of the ways to explain.

Q: What approaches to conflict resolution have you found work best in Kyrgyzstan?

A: When we got our independence, we found that there were tensions and conflicts, but none of us had any experience in dealing with these before. For both official institutions and for the NGOs, the field of conflict is new in terms of sources, parties and subjects of conflicts and approaches to their resolution. Even the concept of an NGO was new and unclear for the population as well as for the NGOs.

Today's Central Asia is totally different from what it was in the past when traditional methods were appropriate. Western conflict specialists are somehow too idealistic and naïve in their attempts to use traditional methods. "Traditional" is itself a contested term, and using traditional methods is not necessarily the only or even the best solution. Local traditional approaches undeniably have great potential but there are also a number of dangers. Local scientific analyses and a combination of traditional and modern Western approaches to conflict assessment and resolution need to be developed in the region.

Conflict prevention programs in the region tended to focus on elites, "freezing" society, maintaining the status quo, working toward suppressing rather than resolving conflict and maintaining a position of neutrality. But true resolution often depends on challenging local elites, transforming social relations, and, in reality, causing conflict and even taking sides or expressing solidarity with excluded groups.

The problems and conflicts we face today are new. During Soviet times, officials say there were no ethnic tensions, no conflicts. Conflict was not acknowledged, recognized or addressed under the Soviet system. We had tensions but these were suppressed. Thus, there were no local institutions dealing or having experience in conflict management. We also had a very strong government, the ministry of internal affairs and the military. We knew it was not our business, not the citizen's business – only at the higher level, in Moscow.

Q: How do most Kyrgyz respond to the threat of Islamic extremism?

A: There is some passive support for the Islamists in the region. There is a difference in perception with respect to the Quran and national constitutions. Some people feel that a constitution is an official document written in dry, legal language and is the concern only of government bureaucrats. The Quran, on the other hand, is seen as an inheritance passed on from one generation to the next. It also addresses concerns of ordinary people such as brotherhood and mutual support. Those who feel that governments are not addressing such issues may be particularly attracted to the Quran. Islamic groups are also extremely aware of education's potential and are targeting the youth. In many respects, they are winning the battle for hearts and minds as state education services decline and more money is directed to religious seminaries and other non-state channels. Particularly worrying trends are the decreasing enrollment levels of children, especially girls in rural schools, and the introduction of user fees which discriminate against poor families. In a time of great uncertainty, Islam may increasingly be seen as the protector, especially among the young who have few alternatives beyond the drug trade or radical Islam.

We needed to educate the local people about Islam because the incursions gave the impression that the religion is bad. But we had no effective means of disseminating real data. Our method of transmitting information was only through posters which were displayed in the markets, schools and mosques.

Q: How effective do you think foreign intervention is in countering extremism?

A: These international interventions – made in the name of security – may provide an excuse for human rights abuses and repression by existing authoritarian regimes, creating a cycle of violence. The security apparatus in each government is growing in influence, undermining political institutions and processes. International groups are also involved in strengthening local law enforcement institutions. Focusing solely on security and law and order, a strategy supported by the international community is likely to exacerbate underlying political and economic tensions in the long run.

As the official economy shrinks, the informal or shadow economy is also expanding. Clearly, the drug trade is benefiting from the lack of a strong state. There is even anecdotal evidence of a linkage

between the Islamic religious groups and the drug traders. On the other hand, conflict also appears to be a catalyst for increased investment in the border regions. To an extent, government officials and villagers are prepared to "talk up" the conflict, perhaps to attract additional donor funding into the region. The local authorities are playing games: They know that more conflicts and tensions mean more money.

Islamic fundamentalism is more of a reaction to unjust governments and poverty than a serious military threat to the West.

Q: How does FTI help with people's access to information?

A: We see the information component as the main component in our activities. But you really need to be careful. We often use words such as objectivity, non-bias and impartial, but it is easier said than done. Information also reflects the opinion or view of that person who writes or pays for that information. It is good if that person has good intentions.

Second, the problem with information is it costs money, because nothing is free. Somebody has to buy it. And buying information means buying it physically, paying for it. But the problem in our region is there is no resource. People do not have the resources to pay for that. If it is serious information, it needs strong motivation to buy it. And literature on conflict, it is not something that people are ready to buy.

Three, journalists now criticize us nongovernmental organizations that we get grants from the donors and we provide the population with free information, because everything is actually paid by the donors. But that means we again create a culture of not paying. Professional journalists, who have their own companies, say we create problems for them. When they publish their magazines and their newspapers, they make people pay, whereas we bring something which is free of charge. It is also a very serious thing we need to think about.

Q: What kind of information does FTI try to share with people?

A: On the subject concerning border disputes, we explained to the people the importance of delimitation and demarcation in the peaceful resolution of the issues. It may be inconvenient for them now, but it will be better for their children in the future. We cited examples in the international arena showing how border disputes have been settled through conciliatory and peaceful means. We want people to expand their knowledge and understand that there are institutionalized options available. But it can get difficult because the communities oftentimes are not aware of what is going on outside their immediate environs. I heard about delimitation and demarcation only four years ago and I come from the urban area. So imagine the situation of the local people who do not have adequate access to information.

Q: How did you shift, both yourself and FTI, from a project to program approach?

A: In 1996 and 1997 I thought about the southern part of Kyrgyzstan, but I did not think of the influence of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. I just knew that there was a problem about water and my

understanding was we needed to address this problem. Today I see things differently. Today I understand that the role of our organization is to change the way of thinking, and not just to implement projects.

Within FTI, we would like the whole NGO team not to work on separate projects but one program. When we were doing the "project approach," the staff members were implementing activities with the thinking that these were the appropriate responses to emergency situations. We did not follow any institutionalized system of pursuing programs that truly addressed the root causes of the conflict.

That is why, when you look at FTI's program, the criticism is there are too many projects. And it was too quick. It is not normal for an NGO that is only five years old to be implementing so many projects. But why did it happen? Because of the situation in the region.

Q: Was it hard to make that shift?

A: At the local level, we explained to the people in the conflict zones that the role of FTI was not to install pipelines or construct school buildings. This was only a short-term instrument to achieve a long-term goal. People wanted very quick solutions and it was very hard because we had to start with meetings, with roundtable discussions.

There was also very strong pressure from the officials that we needed to start a project at once. During meetings, the people and the officials would say that they already know this, so we should proceed with the actual project implementation. But the people need to understand why it is important to bring together all the stakeholders, to have all groups represented, and that there are necessary and appropriate steps to follow before finally going to the infrastructure part.

People must understand why infrastructure often has to be last. Once they understand that, they will no longer push you. But of course, sometimes there are situations, especially when the level of violence is very high, when infrastructure will have to be put in place even while meetings and discussions are still being conducted.

Q: Whose voices need to be heard in the community dialogues that FTI helps to facilitate?

A: The geographically crosscutting dimensions of the conflict issues in Central Asia also underline the significance of increasing inter-governmental collaboration. Security programs and policies have been imposed in the region without consultation with local organizations such as NGOs, political parties and organizations of women and youth.

Little analysis has been done at the micro-level, and more effort should be invested in understanding how transition affects communities. Local voices are frequently missing from current mainstream analysis. There are marked differences from village to village and district to district, which means that generalized conclusions are of limited value.

People at the grassroots level know their situation better but oftentimes they are unable to initiate the appropriate remedial measures due to institutional limitations. Changing the system is only possible if there is somebody on top who can introduce mechanisms that will address the conflict situation. This is where NGOs and civil society come in and function as mediators and go-betweens for the locals.

Q: What needs to happen at the macro-level?

A: Working at the macro-level also necessitates increased networking among civil society organizations. Enhanced cooperation will enable us to utilize resources, be it financial or human expertise, more effectively. It will also strengthen our position, as we are now better able to redirect resources to fit the needs of our country and our people.

Donors have tended to work around conflict rather than attempting to explicitly address conflict dynamics. There are very few donors and NGOs working on conflict through programs that attempt to build good governance, promote human rights and address resource competition. At the same time, there are very few NGOs that have ambitious goals and that have tried to adopt innovative approaches, as they have to operate in a changing and unstable regional context.

But working around conflict is not sustainable and only mitigates the situation for the short-term. It does not address the root causes of the conflict. But if the international community sees the strength and cohesiveness of local organizations, then there is greater chance for implementing the appropriate development programs that have been identified by the people themselves. This also forestalls the duplication of initiatives by the different groups. Civil society will also have a greater chance of being heard by the government.

Q: What is the path from conflict to peace?

A: Conflict can also bring lasting peace. During World War II our region was extremely poor, but the people understood that they were poor because they were protecting the motherland. But now people are poor because of injustice. They do not have equal access to resources. Peace has to be pursued with justice. Peace and justice can only exist when people have equal access to resources and opportunities.

JOAN B. KROC INSTITUTE FOR PEACE & JUSTICE

The mission of the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice (IPJ) is to foster peace, cultivate justice and create a safer world. Through education, research and peacemaking activities, the IPJ offers programs that advance scholarship and practice in conflict resolution and human rights. The institute, a unit of the University of San Diego's Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies, draws on Catholic social teaching that sees peace as inseparable from justice and acts to prevent and resolve conflicts that threaten local, national and international peace.

The IPJ was established in 2000 through a generous gift from the late Joan B. Kroc to the University of San Diego to create an institute for the study and practice of peace and justice. Programming began in early 2001 and the building was dedicated in December 2001 with a conference, "Peacemaking with Justice: Policy for the 21st Century."

The institute strives, in Joan B. Kroc's words, to not only talk about peace, but also make peace. In its peacebuilding initiatives, the IPJ works with local partners to help strengthen their efforts to consolidate peace with justice in the communities in which they live. In Nepal, for example, for nearly a decade the IPJ has been working with Nepali groups to support inclusiveness and dialogue in the transition from armed conflict and monarchy to peace and multiparty democracy. In its West African Human Rights Training Initiative, the institute partners with local human rights groups to strengthen their ability to pressure government for reform and accountability.

In addition to the Women PeaceMakers Program, the institute has several ongoing programs. The Joan B. Kroc Distinguished Lecture Series is a forum for high-level national and international leaders and policymakers to share their knowledge and perspective on issues related to peace and justice.

WorldLink, a year-round educational program for middle school and high school students from San Diego and Baja California, connects youth to global affairs.

Community outreach includes speakers, films, art and opportunities for discussion between community members, academics and practitioners on issues of peace and social justice, as well as dialogue with national and international leaders in government, nongovernmental organizations and the military.

In addition to the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice, the Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies includes the Trans-Border Institute, which promotes border-related scholarship and an active role for the university in the cross-border community, and a master's program in Peace and Justice Studies to train future leaders in the field.

UNIVERSITY OF SAN DIEGO

Chartered in 1949, the University of San Diego (USD) is a Roman Catholic institution of higher learning located on 180 acres overlooking San Diego's Mission Bay. The University of San Diego is committed to promoting academic excellence, expanding liberal and professional knowledge, creating a diverse community and preparing leaders dedicated to ethical and compassionate service.

The university is steadfast in its dedication to the examination of the Catholic tradition as the basis of a continuing search for meaning in contemporary life. Global peace and development and the application of ethics and values are examined through campus centers and institutes such as the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice, the Values Institute, the Trans-Border Institute, the Center for Public Interest Law, the Institute for Law and Philosophy and the International Center for Character Education. Furthermore, through special campus events such as the Social Issues Conference, the James Bond Stockdale Leadership and Ethics Symposium and the Joan B. Kroc Distinguished Lecture Series, we invite the community to join us in further exploration of these values.

The USD campus, considered one of the most architecturally unique in the nation, is known as Alcalá Park. Like the city of San Diego, the campus takes its name from San Diego de Alcalá, a Franciscan brother who served as the infirmarian at Alcalá de Henares, a monastery near Madrid, Spain. The Spanish Renaissance architecture that characterizes the five-century-old University of Alcalá serves as the inspiration for the buildings on the USD campus. The architecture was intended by the founders, Bishop Charles Francis Buddy and Mother Rosalie Hill, to enhance the search for truth through beauty and harmony. Recent additions, such as the state-of-the-art Donald P. Shiley Center for Science and Technology and the new School of Leadership and Education Sciences building carry on that tradition.

A member of the prestigious Phi Beta Kappa, USD is ranked among the nation's top 100 universities. The university offers its 7,500 undergraduate, graduate and law students rigorous academic programs in more than 60 fields of study through six academic divisions, including the College of Arts and Sciences and the schools of Business Administration, Leadership and Education Sciences, Law, and Nursing and Health Science. The Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies opened in Fall 2007.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

FTI	Foundation for Tolerance International
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IMU	Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan
IPJ	Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
USD	University of San Diego

ENDNOTES

[1] A version of this paragraph first appeared in the article "'Women Cannot Cry Anymore': Global Voice Transforming Violent Conflict," by Emiko Noma in *Critical Half*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (2007). Copyright 2007 Women for Women International.

[2] Mikhail Gorbachev was general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from 1985 to 1991 and president of the Soviet Union 1990 to 1991.

[3] Kyrgyzstan gained independence Aug. 31, 1991. The five new independent republics of Central Asia were Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, which all joined the Commonwealth of Independent States on Dec. 13, 1991.

[4] According to FTI's website (www.fti.org.kg), as of October 2003 the Ferghana Valley contained approximately 75 contested regions (in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan) and 70 disputed areas (in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan).

[5] An oblast is a region or province of Kyrgyzstan.

[6] Suppression of the press was common in Kyrgyzstan, with radio and TV run by the state. Newspapers publishing dissenting views were often harassed and sometimes forced to shut down.

[7] Information on Foundation for Tolerance International is based on interviews and research conducted in 2003. For updates and more on FTI's current work, visit their website at www.fti.org.kg