

Voices from areas of conflict

Abraham Gebreyesus Mehreteab from Eritrea, who lost an arm and an eye as a child when playing with one of the many landmines with which his long-suffering country has been contaminated after by now forty years of war, lives in Germany, where he was granted asylum. Here and with the United Nations he stands up for the conscientious objectors in his country. He described in a most poignant manner the nearly hopeless situation faced by conscientious objectors who, under their dictatorial regime, have to serve ridiculously long prison sentences and even suffer torture. This country is a clear example for the demand that deserters, too, should be granted asylum. Abraham encountered the CPTI board and its work at meetings of the Committee for Human Rights in Geneva and became a CPTI member.

Kanhaiya Prasad Joshi came from Nepal in order to report on the political upheavals in his country. For the last ten years or so, again and again there has been serious unrest which has already claimed 15,000 lives, the result of ideological conflicts between supporters of the feudal monarchy, parliamentary democracy and the Maoists. The life of society as a whole has become uncertain and unstable.

In April 2006 civilian society succeeded in strengthening the democratic parties to such an extent that they were able to put an end to feudalism and the monarchy. Since then the 7 political parties in parliament have been negotiating with each other and with the Maoists about a new constitution and in particular about the role of the army. A problem is, that still so many Nepalese have sympathy for the monarchy.

Kanhaiya sees a good chance to find promoters of conscientious objection to military taxes and for peace tax initiatives, both with civilian Nepalese society and with the Maoists, as non-violence is part of the Nepalese character. The situation is different among party politicians, and among the Maoists too, as long as the latter have not been recognized by the other parties. Kanhaiya does not feel he can forecast the end of this struggle - it may well result in more serious unrest. Kanhaiya's group FOSEED is very active concerning our subject and has spoken to some members of parliament. There is little point of membership in CPTI so far, as for the time being, Nepal only recognizes Nepalese NGOs.

(On the 21st of November, the 7 political parties in parliament and the Maoists signed a binding contract which made an end to ten years of civil war, brought the Maoists into parliament and wants to integrate them into the army.)

For the third time the Mennonite priest **Michael Kodzo Badasu from Ghana** took part in the conference. In his country the refusal to pay military taxes is not yet on the agenda. Michael is seeking organizations to support his work concerning the following areas: campaign against ethnocentricity; increased information on HIV/AIDS; gender equality; campaign against malaria and guinea worm. An acute problem for him is the fact that his office equipment is out of date.

Nana-Fosu Randall (Ghana and USA) who, together with John Randall, took part in the World Peace Forum in Vancouver, was deeply distressed about the silence concerning Africa in talks about war. Iraq and Afghanistan are always on the agenda, when in Africa alone, currently nine wars are raging.

Brunhilde Stötzner showed photographs of Promujer, a project for women in San Marcos, Nicaragua, where she spent one year working as a volunteer during her sabbatical year (2003/04).