

Young Leaders Explore Peacebuilding, Dialogue and the Practice of Nonviolence

Youth Leadership and Peacebuilding Programme | 18 July 2026 | Online

Young participants explored practical approaches to conflict resolution, interfaith cooperation and nonviolent leadership during an online session of the [Universal Peace Federation UK's \(UPF\)](#) Youth Leadership and Peacebuilding Programme on 18 July 2026.

Hosted by Eva Chan and Robin Marsh via Zoom, the programme was chaired by Rudolph Samushonga. Speakers included Caroline Hayward, attorney Dorina Prethi, Dr. David Earle and Dr. Yehoeshahfaht Ben Israel.

Drawing on personal experience, international peacebuilding initiatives and the nonviolence methodology of Dr Martin Luther King Jr., the speakers encouraged participants to consider how inner peace, strong values, constructive dialogue and personal responsibility can contribute to social change.

Key Takeaways

Peace begins within: Self-awareness and compassion prepare people to respond constructively to disagreement.

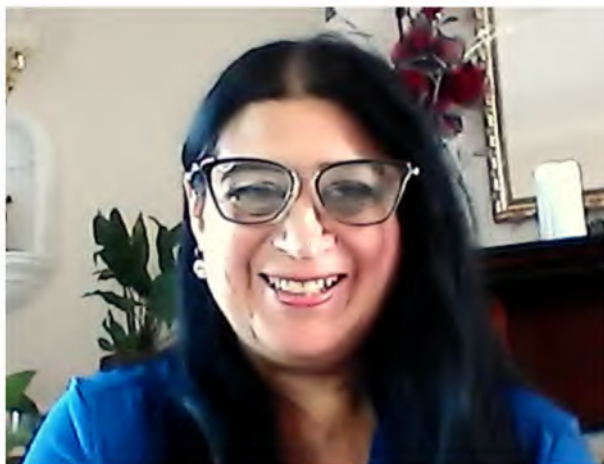
Service builds trust: Practical cooperation can create deeper interfaith relationships than dialogue alone.

Nonviolence is active: Dr King's methodology confronts injustice strategically while protecting human dignity and seeking reconciliation.

Beginning with Inner Peace

Caroline Heward opened the programme with a guided mindfulness and compassion meditation. The exercise helped participants become centred and attentive before engaging with the challenging subjects of conflict and reconciliation.

Her meditation introduced an important theme for the session: peaceful responses to conflict begin with the ability to cultivate peace within ourselves. Inner awareness and compassion can help people listen more carefully, recognise the feelings of others and respond constructively during disagreement.

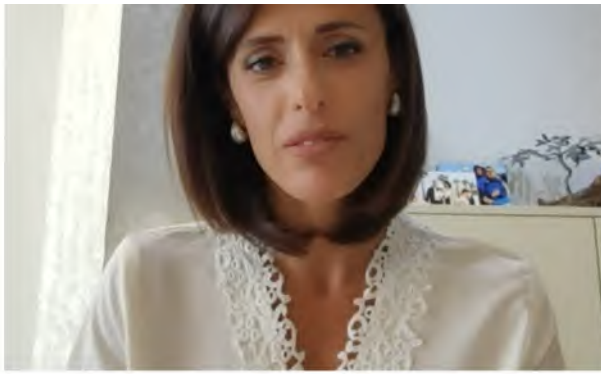


Conflict, Values and Personal Leadership

Dorina Prethi examined the relationship between conflict, family life and personal values. She suggested that many wider social problems have their roots in the family and in the quality of people's closest relationships.



Drawing on personal experience, she observed that unresolved conflict can consume time and emotional energy without producing anything positive. A prolonged period of



silence or resentment between family members, for example, does not help either person to grow or move forward.

Dorina encouraged young people to take responsibility for strengthening their character and protecting the values that support healthy relationships and communities. At a time when some traditional social foundations appear to be weakening, she said young leaders have an important responsibility to “keep the pillars up”.

She also emphasised the formative influence of friendship. Choosing to surround oneself with positive, principled and supportive people is not simply a matter of circumstance,

she explained, but an important decision that can shape a person's character and future direction.

When Helena asked how accountability could be encouraged when someone did not believe they had acted wrongly, Dorina advised participants to remain focused on their mission and continue doing good work. Over time, the consistency and quality of that work can become its own testimony.

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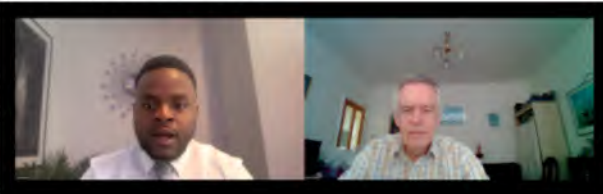
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Building Peace Through Dialogue and Service

Dr David Earle reflected on more than 30 years of interfaith peacebuilding in Birmingham and internationally. His experiences have included initiatives in India and the Middle East, alongside sustained engagement with diverse religious communities in the United Kingdom.



He explained that practical service projects can build deeper relationships than formal meetings alone. When people from different religious or cultural backgrounds work together to meet a shared need, they can develop trust, friendship and mutual respect through direct experience.

Dr Earle recalled youth service projects in Kerala in 1995 and Birmingham in 1996 and 1997. One significant outcome involved a young Hindu participant associated with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh who moved away from a radical outlook after developing friendships through an interfaith project.

He also described helping to build a children's home in Andhra Pradesh for Dalit orphans. In recognition of this work, he received the Hind Rattan Jewel of India Award in 2003, which he accepted on behalf of everyone who had contributed.

Between 2003 and 2008, Dr Earle participated in the Middle East Peace Initiative, taking seven interfaith groups to Israel, the West Bank and Gaza. During the Second Intifada, one delegation was able to enter the Al-Aqsa Mosque together, illustrating what can become possible when relationships of trust are carefully developed.

A central lesson from these projects was the importance of preparation. Dr Earle recommended spending at least two months building relationships with local communities before beginning a service initiative. Local residents should be involved from the outset so that the benefits and relationships can continue after visiting participants have left.

Understanding Dr King's Nonviolence Framework

Dr Yehoeshaft Ben Israel presented the principles and methodology of nonviolence associated with Dr Martin Luther King Jr.



He challenged the assumption that conflict is inherently harmful. Conflict, he explained, is neutral, natural and

inevitable. Violence is produced not by conflict itself, but by conflict that has been misunderstood or mismanaged.

Using the example of gravity, he suggested that conflict is a necessary reality that must be understood and handled appropriately. The objective should not always be to avoid conflict, but to transform it into an opportunity for learning, justice and stronger relationships.



Dr Ben Israel distinguished nonviolence from “negative peace”: the absence of visible violence without the presence of justice, reconciliation or healthy relationships.

Nonviolence, he explained, is not passive. It is an active, disciplined and strategic method of confronting injustice while refusing to violate the dignity of the opposing party. Dr King’s objective was not simply to resolve disagreements, but to achieve reconciliation and create a better society in which all parties could flourish.

Participants joined an interactive exercise examining common myths about nonviolence. They considered why large numbers do not automatically determine the success of a campaign, why demonstrations alone do not represent the full methodology of nonviolence and why violent means cannot be expected to produce genuinely peaceful outcomes.

Dr Ben Israel also explained that Dr King did not originate nonviolence, but developed an approach influenced by earlier practitioners, including Mahatma Gandhi.

He introduced three levels of conflict and suggested that nonviolent intervention works most effectively during the normal and pervasive stages, before a situation becomes overt, heated or violent.

The greatest obstacle to peace, he concluded, is often a failure to understand the other person. Every individual and community has something valuable to contribute to peaceful coexistence.

Discussion and Personal Responsibility

Small-group discussions and an interactive question-and-answer session enabled participants to connect the presentations with their own experiences.

A recurring message throughout the programme was that peacebuilding is not confined to diplomats, governments or large institutions. It begins with everyday choices: how people respond to disagreement, the friendships they form, the values they maintain and the respect they show to those with different perspectives.

Next Youth Leadership Session

The next online session of the Youth Leadership and Development Programme will take place on 8 August 2026, continuing the programme’s focus on equipping young people with the knowledge, character and practical skills needed to become responsible and peace-minded leaders.

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