

DIALOGUE IN NIGERIA ~ Models of engagement replicated in Ivory Coast **Step #6: Albino ~ Non-Albino Reconciliation Workshop** in northern Cote d'Ivoire

VIEW RTI-TV
national news

Part 1: Bouake City — April 2014

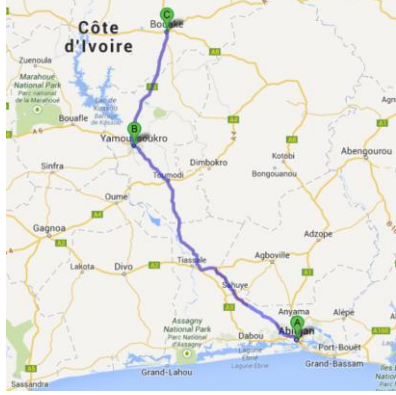
November 2013, Ivory Coast social history was made with the successful [First All-Day Albino ~ Non-Albino Dialogue Conference](#) in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire. It was part of a larger, citizen-driven peacebuilding wave in Cote d'Ivoire facilitated by the Abidjan-based *United for Peace Against Conflict International (UFPACI)* -- <http://ufpacidialogue.net> -- and documented in text, photos, and video at <http://traubman.igc.org/vidnigeriaivorycoast.htm>



PHOTOS from
November 2013
preparatory
gatherings in
Southern Cote
d'Ivoire



At the heart of the success were new relationships between Offuh James OFFUH, Executive Director of UFPACI, Mamidou COULIBALY, President of Albinos Federation of Cote d'Ivoire, are Ms. Rita Estelle TOMETY.



The next 2014 steps were to expand the circle of communication, awareness, and relationship-building 350 kilometers north into **Bouake**, then finally the capital, **Yamoussoukro** where superstition, misunderstanding, and mistreatment of people with albinism is greatest.

The Need

Adults and children with albinism suffer exclusion and humiliation, and sometimes kidnapping and ritual sacrifice due to inherited cultural practices of the northern Baoule ethnic citizens. The great need is to build trust then bring into face-to-face Sustained Dialogue the traditional heads and the albino community in Bouake then Yamoussoukro in the northern Gbeke region.

Listening to personal life stories and clarifying the medical condition and biological causes of albinism will bring albinos closer to traditional leaders while creating heart connections that help humanize and dignify everyone. This will increase the probability of abandoning ancient superstitions of the shivisehs (chiefs) and some of their followers in the countryside, and creating a sustainable community that includes everyone.

Tireless Travel and Trust-Building

Succeeding in hard-won, face-to-face trust-building required travelling 350 km. north to Bouake by Offuh with Gnamien Louis Patrice, Executive Secretary of UFPACI. Earning confidence and consent required multiple meetings with:

1. **Mr. Silue Pegabila**, President, Bouake Communal Youth Association, who mobilized and sensitized the communal youth of Bouake.
2. **Mr. Kouame Bernard**. Gbeke region Council Administrative Inspector, who made possible the many meetings and mobilization of the traditional rulers of Gbeke.
3. **Mr. Coulibaly Daouda**, President, Bouake Handicapped Association, helped mobilize the people with albinism in Bouake.
4. **Mr. Coulibaly Arounan**, President, Bouake Albino Community and **Ms. Kaudiola Rokia**. Secretary, Bouake Albino Community, who mobilized and sensitized the albino participants of Bouake.



Pre-Workshop Preparation —Friday, 04 April 2014

Preparing for Saturday's dance performance for the Dialogue Workshop, Friday until 8:30 at night (20h.30) group training at Hotel Le Phenicia Bouake was directed by volunteer Ty-Juana Taylor, a Ph.D. student of Ethnomusicology at the Herb Alpert School of Music, University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) USA.





COULIBALY Arouna, President of the Bouake Albinos Community rehearsed dancing with OFFUH James, President and Founder of ONG-UFPACI. Into the night, the choreography rehearsal and dancing excellence created a strong union between the albinos of Bouake and UFPACI NGO delegation from Abidjan.

First All-Day Albino ~ Non-Albino Reconciliation Workshop in Bouake Saturday, 04 April 2014



Beginning at 8h:00 (8:00 am) in the Maire Bouake Cultural Center Hall, participants entered the dialogue workshop and sat separately from those different from themselves. Albinos sat exclusively with only those who accompanied them, for fear of being attacked or kidnapped.



To encourage confidence, Offuh James Offuh of UFPACI clarified the workshop's principles in the larger reality of our existence -- one spirit, one humanity, one Earth. He demanded each participant allow the spirit of Dialogue to take preeminence while sharing with people considered different from themselves.



NANAN (King) Kouame Yao Alexis, coordinator of Nimbo GBEKE CHEFS, addressed the general population of Gbeke with gratitude for the Dialogue Workshop initiative. He thanked ONG-UFPACI for travelling 350 km to bring to the Gbeke region awareness, social cohesion, and equal respect for all especially including citizens with albinism for a better, united Gbeke. He shook hands with OFFUH James, Arounda Coulibaly, then with his own colleagues before sitting down.



Big steps were taken after facilitator OFFUH James humbly requested participants in the spirit of Dialogue to move and sit next to someone she or he considers different in skin color, ideology, religion, or social class, to help everyone proceed toward achieving a true Dialogue as embodied and supported by the Jewish-Palestinian Living Room Dialogue USA.

Participants began moving toward those who were different from themselves. Some did not want to comply. The challenging moment required additional facilitator encouragement. Then youths with albinism and those with black skin color began shifting across the aisle toward one another.





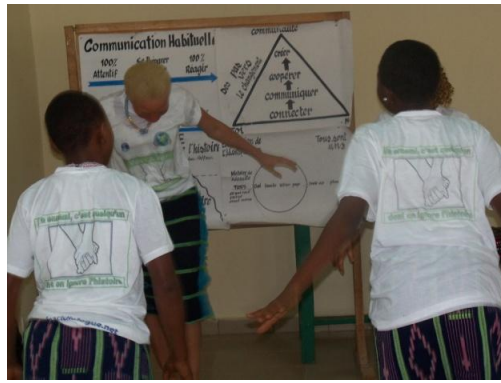
Madam EHORA MARIE Nadege, representing the PREFET (Senator) of GBEKE REGION, spoke in support of the Albino ~ Non-Albino Dialogue Workshop then walked toward the traditional rulers to greet them.

The 250 participants saw a person with albinism sitting for the first time next to a traditional ruler and King without being harassed. Requesting a microphone, Madame Nadege added: *"I am glad to experience for the first time albinos and others sitting as friends. I see with this sustained Dialogue that everyone is closer to one another front the heart."*



"I'm BEHIBRO Demika Anne Marie and I am in Bouaké. I am white skin. And I have red hair and blurred vision. We people with albinism have not chosen this. So why are we rejected? We are human beings like you, intelligent, dedicated, courageous, workers. We just need your affection. nothing but your affection. Help us, include us in the society. I thank you.!"

After concluding her poignant words full of wisdom, she walked into the room with poise to greet the traditional rulers.



Dance and music demonstrated reconciliation and respect for one another notwithstanding one's skin color ethnicity, or race. We are one people!



YAO NDRI Chief of the T'DE Tribe of GBEKE Region: *"I am happy to be here. This seminar should be repeated every month, so that we and our population can build better relationships with the albinos and everybody living in our region. I will discuss with the UFPACI president, I will also talk with the Prefet (senator of Gbeke) to help us sttsamhr for UFPACI to come back into our region. I thank you. May God bless the coordinator of this good project."*



The 250 participants listened then offered questions and insights.



SUSTAINED DIALOGUE -- its meaning, principles and advantages as a new approach to communication for understanding, dignifying, and humanizing each other -- was clarified by OFFUH James.

"This allows us to want the best for each other, making it easier to transform difficult conflicts. Using these communication tools in difficult times helps us create the empathy and compassion we all desire."

THE PUBLIC PEACE PROCESS successfully begins with **face-to-face, eye-to-eye listening** to learn about the "other" without criticism, blame, or objections. This dignifies the speaker and the listener. It helps everyone to be listened-to and heard, opening the door to empathy and discovering what is important to each other. Then we're in the right spirit and more able to find solutions to our specific questions and disputes.

ALBINISM, said OFFUH, *"is from a genetic trait that prevents melanocyte cells from producing the melanin pigment that provides color to protect the skin and eyes from the sun's radiation."*

OFFUH described being awakened by a 2013 article, [Shining a Light on Tanzania's Albinos](#), illustrated by Israeli photojournalist, Liron Shimoni. Shimoni's Tanzania travel experiences of the social and biological problems albinos are facing in that country disturbed OFFUH. He learned that in recent years, over 70 Tanzania albinos have been murdered and have had their limbs stolen for use in black magic potions. They are considered "white meat" and painfully dehumanized and stigmatized.

OFFUH added: *"My personal discovery is that, albinism is a medical condition, the biological inheritance of certain genetic traits passed from both parents. If an albino marries black skin person, the couple will almost always produce a black skin child. So albinism is not related to ignorance and superstition that says 'an albino is a cursed being, so they must be used for sacrifices or appeasing of the gods.' NO. capital N-O. This is a wrong perception. They are human beings like all of us seated here. Please remember the lovely, wisdom-rich poem presentation of our albino daughter, Behibro Demika Anne Marie. Listen to that poem from the heart. I believe your outlook will change. I invite you all to love the albinos as yourselves. Without the albinos, there will be no 'US.' We are one people, one spirit, one Earth, one Humanity. Thank you."*



AROUNA Coulibaly, President of the Bouake Albinos Community, added: *"We are glad for this initiative. We thank the organizers of this great ceremony. We, thank all invited guests, particulars the Traditional Rulers who accepted to honor this invitation, and also all the government bodies, and public opinion leaders. We all know how albinos in general are being marginalized and stigmatized in the society. We know the only way to fight this phenomenon is by Education, by sensitizing the public to the true biological causes of albinism. This will change public attitudes towards albinos and this will facilitate general inclusion of us citizens with albinism around the world, I thank you."*





Vous & moi
Ecoutons en dialoguant
You and me
Listening in dialogue

Un ennemi, c'est quelqu'un
 dont on ignore l'histoire
An enemy is one
whose story you don't know



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The PERSPECTIVE SQUARES EXPERIENCE allowed participants to realize that diverse people have a variety of perceptions and views of life. There is more than one way -- my way -- to see a situation.

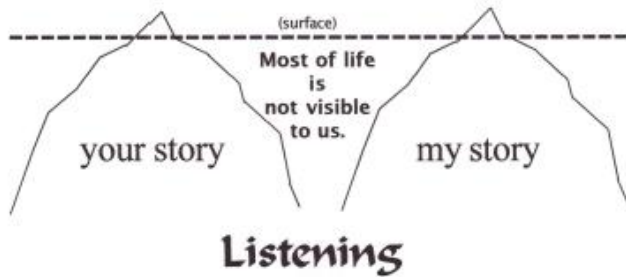


BECOMING CLOSER — Two people, like neighboring icebergs, grow closer as they go more deeply beneath the surface.

Pursuing relationships, we citizens — enemies, too — discover one another's equal humanity.

A profound attitude change follows: we begin to want the best, not only for self but for the other, more equally.

"An enemy is one whose story we have not heard."
Gene Knudsen-Hoffman



Experience shows that beneath one's image and protective layers are universal human qualities that long for personal connection and reunion with humankind.

The power to close distances between people and nations lies in Story and disciplined Listening — excellent communication called Sustained Dialogue.

The MASK AND CULTURE EXPERIENCE showed how one's culture shapes, influences, even "pressures" personal responses to life. Participants became more self-aware. They grew closer by opening windows to themselves and daily challenges universally faced in all cultures.



Facilitator OFFUH James first demonstrated, then participants took time to self-introspect about their individual lives — values, ideologies, relationships, cultural influences, peer and family pressures. They considered how they protect against "others" by creating barriers to building authentic human relationships.

Next, the diverse participants wrote and drew symbols, and art figures on their personal masks.

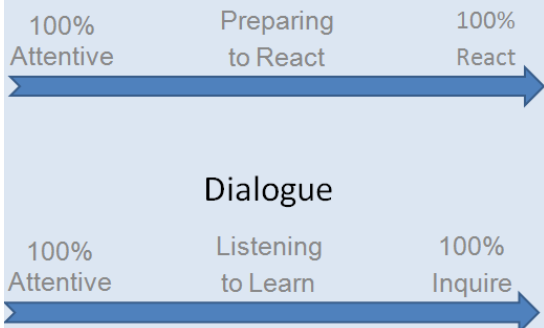


AKOUE N GORAN CHEF D' AHOUGOUSSOU OF GBEKE: *"I am glad personally to participate. This mask helped me to understand who I really am and who I am not. Thank you UFPACI."*

Madam EHORA Nadege described all she learned herself and culture's influence.



Usual Communication



AN EXPERIENCE OF DIALOGUE, the barrier-breaker, allows each person to share her or his life's narrative and relate to others. Each person experiences a new quality of listening-to-learn as well as being heard, while discovering that "an enemy is one whose story we have not heard."



INSTRUCTIONS: For the next 30 minutes, storyteller narrates his or her life in 10 minutes. The listener only listens-to-learn without speaking. The next 5 minutes is for the listener to ask good questions to learn more. At the 15-minute point, the listener becomes the storyteller, the storyteller the listener, thus sharing time equally. The facilitator advises: "Please include in your story what you were told about people unlike yourself — outside of your religion, ethnicity, tribe, race, or skin color."



Challenging at first, soon there was a buzz in the room. Quickly barriers fell, listening improved, new relationships began. **This historic moment** found adults and youth with albinism in face-to-face communication excellence and empathy with the general community and Traditional Rulers for the first time.





A woman with albinism expressed her joy of being heard for the first time in large public and also before a traditional chiefs -- impossible until now. "I say thank you to the organizers of this great encounter. I pray to God to help continue these actions. My souls rejoices."



"I am so happy about this meeting. For the first time, I spoke with the chiefs."



"I was so happy to communicate with Madam representative of the Senator of Gbeke."

"I feel so relieved and satisfied. I have never sat by an albino person. In fact, when we were small children, we use to be afraid whenever we saw people with albinism. But this Dialogue has removed those discrimination and prejudice we used to have about the albinos. Thank you to the organizers of this day."



HUMANITARIAN GIFTS for albino participants were provided by UFPACI and by [Fely Tchaco \(TCHACO Lou Leye Felicite\)](#), a [generous African musical artist](#) from Cote d'Ivoire and now living in California, USA.



The Regional Administrators and Traditional Rulers were asked to help hand gifts to albino youth and adults.





Toys, sunscreen, sunglasses, and protective hats from TCHACO Fely and UFPACI were gifted to albino participants.



Participants wanted to gather for a one-family snap when the workshop ended at 14hr.30 (2:30 pm). They were then served snack foods, natural juices, and water before returning to their homes with new information, skills, relationships, and reason for optimism.

Facilitator's Concluding Thoughts

Sustained Dialogue is the breaker of barriers and hard issues that divide.

*Sustained Dialogue is the therapy for a sick society
suffering from a disease worse than HIV/AIDS:
HRV, Human Relationship--deficiency Virus."*

*For the sake of our only Earth, our one home and one tribe, where we all belong,
I humbly call all authentic human beings to carry on this vision and
let's transform the world in one generation to
a conscious, listening world, a world of connection,
a world of understanding and a world of peace.*

*Long live the culture of Sustainable Dialogue, the new way of healthy living to
end the culture of impunity.*

*This is a new era in this 21st Century, a movement in one spirit for the
success of the hopeful, new global community beyond war
we all long for.*



This April 2014 experience was sponsored and facilitated by
United for Peace Against Conflict International (ONG UFPACI) - Cote d'Ivoire
in partnership with the
Jewish-Palestinian Living Room Dialogue - California USA

Facilitator Guidelines for exercises seen above are at
<http://traubman.igc.org/campacts.pdf>

The larger Cote d'Ivoire peacebuilding story is on the Web at
<http://traubman.igc.org/vidnigeriaivorycoast.htm>

This document is on the Web at
<http://traubman.igc.org/vidnigeriaivorycoast03.pdf>

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