



# DRC Update

DISPUTE RESOLUTION CENTER

SUMMER 2003

## DISPUTE RESOLUTION CENTER

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## *Silence and Conflict Cultures*

*By Kurt Burch*

In advance of the spring 2003 US military campaign in Iraq, did you discuss with your friends or family Saddam Hussein or US foreign policy goals? Did you discuss with neighbors the political signs that dotted local lawns?

According to Tom Fiutak, director of the Center for Conflict and Change at the University of Minnesota, silence was the striking feature of the public's reaction to the buildup and conduct of recent US military action in Iraq. Professor Fiutak believes that at water coolers and backyard fences across the country, many people remained silent out of fear. In a talk hosted by the DRC Fiutak shared his views on April 21, 2003, in Borlaug Hall on the St. Paul campus of the U of M. Fiutak entitled his talk "From 9/11 to the Iraqi incursion: some thoughts on the shift in community, national, and international conflict cultures." An audience of approximately 50, including many DRC members, listened intently, voiced varied opinions, and asked many questions.

Fiutak acknowledged protests against the war and rallies in support. However, he argued that the public reaction to the recent conflict was relatively silent. He contrasted this silence to the outspoken reactions to previous cases of US military force and to other public concerns, such as taxes and the environment. Fiutak believes that public silence arises from many forms of fear. These include fear of public scorn, job insecurity, uncertain future conditions, and a current "patriotic fervor" that condemns critics of US leaders as security threats and abettors of US enemies.

Indeed, in this setting, firebrands of nationalist patriotism and vehement critics of US policy often seek to silence or drown out their rivals. The result is an arid, empty, rhetorically extreme public discourse, the fears it inflames, and the cowed silence it breeds. When such fears accompany "trust" and "dependency", the silence grows. For example, Fiutak argued, many people chose expressly not to form or convey an opinion because they trust the US government's intentions and information more than their own limited knowledge. Arising from such trust and lack of information, citizens come to depend on their government and leaders to make such difficult decisions on their behalf.

Trust and dependency thus relieve individuals of the demands of investigating and forming policy opinions. Silence arises.

Fiutak argued that a fundamental prerequisite of a democratic society is spirited, informed public discussion. When silence eclipses discussion, democracy suffers. When silence informs a society's reactions to conflict, then that society becomes less able to challenge the impetus to violence. Peace and stability may suffer. The resulting "conflict culture" -- at local, national, and international levels -- may become more martial and less cordial.

Thus, for Fiutak, the principles of mediation and conflict management are not simply tools for solving problems and resolving disputes.

Rather, such principles can become central to a society's makeup and to an individual's lifestyle. Mediation and conflict management encourage participants to voice their views and concerns in the name of creating and fostering healthy communities, whether local or global. In this regard silence is cloudy and corrosive, not golden.

*Message From the Board Chair*

"In the good old summer time....."

Summer is like a gift to us, it gives us the opportunity to step back, slow the pace, and regroup for what lies ahead. For DRC this means the serious challenge of looking to a future in a rather unfriendly financial world. Each of us values DRC as an institution, as a service provider to the community, and as a home for our shared values about peace in the world....what ought to be.

Like so many, DRC is being asked to do more with less. The governmental supporters, the corporate donors, the foundations, the individuals and families who give; all have had to tighten their belts over the past year. This is why we are asking for your assistance and why we are sure you understand.

Join DRC in using the summer to devise new and ingenious ways to work for a future which is more peaceful and enduring. Regardless of the nature and amount of your contribution--time, thought, or money--it is the insight that you give which is important to DRC.

Call me -- at 612-624-1098 -- or Jeanne -- at 651-292-6067-- and exchange with us your ideas and gifts for the promise of the future for DRC. Whatever you share will be deeply appreciated.

In closing, let me note that the past year has been an exciting one for me as Chair of the Board of Directors of DRC. As I return to Board service as a member and Past-Chair, I note that the leadership of the Board is being turned over to two capable and dedicated people. Colleen Luna, Senior Commander of the Saint Paul Police Department, and Eleanor Ling, a private consultant, will be sharing leadership duties for the coming year. I leave the DRC Board leadership in four very capable hands as these two dedicated individuals move up to leadership roles. I am certain you will hear much good from them in the coming year.

Sincerely,

*Ross E. Azevedo*

*Congratulations and Thanks!*

The following individuals completed the 30-Hour Basic Mediation Skills Training in 2003:

Paul Amla	Erin Chapman	Jane A. Hunt	Thomas C. Newman
Maria O. Arboleda	Michael Edwards	Chanze Henderson	W. Loren Niemi
Eugene Atkins	Shawna Egan	Antoinette Johnson	Jewel Pickert
Gregory S. Barnett	John Fossum	Bill Kell	Sheila Radtke
Anne Marie Bartlett	Dennis Gimmestad	Laurie Locust	Ahmed K. Sirleaf
Jan Beebe	Deborah R. Goldberg	Lynne Markus	Verretta Strickland
Karl Blakely	Jean Haley	Renette McParland	Kris Van Amber
Jonathan Bucki	Afeworki Ghorghis	Julianne Mossak	Sherilyn A. Young
	Haregot	Charles Nagle	

The following DRC Volunteers completed an additional 20-hour training in Family Mediation:

Greg Barnett	Karl Blakely	Stephanie Barnett Erickson	Amy Hart
Peter Lewon	Renette McParland	Shawn Nygaard	Jon Poppele
			Thomas Powell

*Special thanks to Trainers and Coaches*

*Aimee Gourlay                      Milt Thomas*

*Stephanie Barnett Erickson, Eric Kestin, Ellen Velasco-Thompson, Eduardo Wolle, Karen Hollaus, Heron Diana, Leslie Goranson, Shawn Nygaard*

## *How I Discovered the Dispute Resolution Center*

*By Ahmed K. Sirleaf, Intern*

Until I met Professor Ken Fox, Director of the Conflict Studies Program, of Hamline University, I had not heard of such a thing as the St. Paul Dispute Resolution Center. It all happened this day when professor Fox scheduled an off campus meeting for our class, Approaches to Conflict Response, at the DRC. This field class meeting was meant to make us, Hamline University Conflict Studies Students, see how conflicts are handled first hand in the field.

The DRC was a perfect place to get this experience. And once at the DRC for our class meeting that day, I only needed to have met the DRC's Executive Director, Jeanne Zimmer to decide that the DRC was the most ideal place for me to do my Legal Studies Internship. For me, with my academic minor interest in Conflict Studies, the DRC was the perfect place to learn.

The DRC not only is providing me with an opportunity to do my internship, and learn professional skills. It has also trained me in basic skills mediation training, as provided under Minnesota Statute 494. The opportunities it has provided me to observe and serve as a volunteer mediator at Ramsey County Housing and Conciliation Courts, could not be a better chance for me to blend my legal studies training with my Conflict Studies interest. DRC has exposed me to the courtroom environment, which has helped me learn many valuable things about the courtroom settings and proceedings. How better could I have wanted it? The DRC is simply one of the secret riches of the Twin Cities.

The DRC is full of friendly and professional people, who make me feel very welcome and at ease. I was amazed by the way the DRC is structured and professionally organized. Each mediation case is treated with high level of professionalism, and confidentiality. I believe the way the DRC places high ethical standards and professional responsibility upon the shoulders of its staff and volunteers has made it one of the great resources for the East Metro area to take advantage of, and have their disputes resolved by DRC mediators.

I am originally from Liberia, West Africa, where conflict is currently raging. For that, as a Liberian who has experienced the pain and suffering of war, in my native land, I decided I would do something better with my life in order that I may be able to help other people in conflict situations.

I was once a refugee in Sierra Leone. I was once helped, in my desperations and destitute situations, in the water-oo refugee camp by others. I was helped by other people who had put their lives to better use, by working for international humanitarian organizations, such as the UN High Commission for Refugee (UNHCR), UN Development Programs (UNDP), CAUSE Canada, World Food Program and so on. Most of those people, who helped me and my country men and women were volunteers. That is why I take pleasure in volunteering to help people get out of conflict situations. Though conflicts are an inextricable part of our lives, they are however the last thing you want. Stay out of conflict. However, you if do get into one, get help with mediation from the Dispute Resolution Center.

I believe my mediation training and professional experiences will enhance my professional interest in law, and domestic and international conflict intervention. I will more so put my mediation skills into helping mediate and resolve conflict on the African continent, particularly in West Africa, and in my own native Liberia.

### **MISSION**

The Dispute Resolution Center promotes the constructive resolution of conflict through open communication and shared decision making.

*The DRC Update is published seasonally by the Dispute Resolution Center*

974 West Seventh Street, St. Paul, MN 55102

651-292-6067 651-292-6065 fax

[www.disputeresolutioncenter.org](http://www.disputeresolutioncenter.org)

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974 W. Seventh Street  
St. Paul, Minnesota 55102

### Save the Dates!

Mediation In-service: "Jungian types, Group Problem Solving, and Mediation"  
Wednesday, September 10, 6:30 – 9:30 PM      Facilitator: Milt Thomas

Introduction to Restorative Justice    Thursday, September 18 7:00 – 9:00 PM  
Facilitator: Jean Greenwood

Circle Training for Mediators  
Friday, October 3, 6:00 – 9:00 PM  
Saturday, October 4, 9:00 AM – 3:30 PM

Large Group Facilitation: designing a process/creating a hybrid...multi-method approach.  
Friday, September 13 6:00 – 9:00 PM  
Saturday, September 14, 9:00 AM – 3:30 PM

DRC will offer a 30-Hour Basic Mediation Skills in September/October and a 20-hour Family Mediation "bridge" course in the fall.

*For more information or to register for one of these trainings,  
please email [drc-administration@comcast.net](mailto:drc-administration@comcast.net) or call 651 292 7791.*

**Restorative Justice Conference "Growing the Connections" -- November 21st and 22nd, 2003**  
**Hamline University \$45.00    See <http://www.mnmrsc.org> for more information**