

MONTREAL INTERNATIONAL DOCUMENTARY FESTIVAL
2015 Selection



reFrame Films presents

In Pursuit a film by Garry Beitel of Peace

(85 min., Canada, 2015)

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«If you want to make peace with your enemy, you have to work with your enemy. Then he becomes your partner.»

-Nelson Mandela-

For forty years, up until the 1990s, Canada was an international leader in the United Nations' peacekeeping operations. Starting in the 1990s, however, the country repositioned its army as a fighting force. Since 2001, Canada has joined the United States and NATO in their wars against terrorism. Among countries that contribute to UN missions, Canada has dropped from its first-place ranking to 68th.

Most Canadians say they'd prefer our armed forces resume their leading role in peacekeeping missions.

Inspired by this heritage, many Canadians have taken up positions of leadership as part of international initiatives aimed at putting an end to wars.

They are dedicated to the pursuit of peace.

In Pursuit of Peace

Synopsis

In Pursuit of Peace is a feature documentary about the impact of war and peace on the lives of some of the millions of people whose worlds have been uprooted by the ravages of armed conflict. The film tells the little known stories of Canadians on the front lines of international peace initiatives. We travel with them to some of the world's most active conflicts – South Sudan, Turkey, Congo (DRC) and Northern Iraq. We step behind the battle lines and experience the challenges of their peacemaking work, exploring how their hopes, their commitments and strategies are challenged by deeply entrenched conflicts.

The film explores the impact that violence has had on the lives of those directly affected by armed conflict - as we immerse ourselves in a new 21st century paradigm of conflict resolution.

Q & A

Garry Beitel

director

What was your point of entry into the plight of civilian peace workers?

An idea was proposed to me and my producer, Barry Lazar, four years ago: “Would you be interested in investigating a film about peace?” What a vague idea, I thought. Where to begin with something like that? I did a lot of reading on peace movements and peace efforts, and became quite interested in the practical aspects of peace – not peace as a dream, which feels very utopian, but the people who are working to advance the cause of peace. I discovered a whole field of Peace and Conflict Studies, which has been developing since the 1990s. In Canada, there are about 50 such programs offered in universities and colleges. People have been actively doing this kind of work for over 20 years with the United Nations, non-governmental organizations, charities, the European Union, the African Union and the like. I’d liken it to the environmental movement, which didn’t exist 40 years ago. People didn’t go to school in environmental studies thinking they could then get a job doing something to improve the environment. I probably spoke to 25 Canadians involved in this line of work, then honed in on eight that I spent considerable time speaking to. For reasons of timing, access, ensuring a diverse representation of participants and visually compelling material, I chose to follow Tiffany Easthom, Kai Brand-Jacobsen, Oumar Sylla and Andrew Marshall.



In our era of widespread cynicism, it’s refreshing to meet people who dedicate their lives to reconciliation, healing and conflict resolution. Would it be fair to say a strong sense of hope fuels your characters’ work?

It depends what we mean by hope. Hope for the end of war? That’s a big agenda. When someone loses their family, their community and the life they used to have, they feel completely discouraged. They find themselves in refugee camps, feeling angry and hurt. The hopelessness that comes in at that point is overwhelming. It’s debilitating. So if someone like Kai Brand-Jacobsen can work with them, build hope that they can go back and be effective in making connections with other people who’ve experienced that, and slowly work to rebuild, that’s hopeful. People like Elias, who says, at the end of the film: “Now I feel hopeful that I can move forward,” as opposed to the overwhelming feeling of depression. That’s the kind of hope you’re building – a sense of hopefulness that violence can be challenged. They’re planting the seed, and they don’t expect to see any immediate results on a large scale in the short term. And in other cases, the work of these ‘peacebuilders’ is actually leading to the resolution of violent conflict. And that gives us hope.

The movement of people across borders plays a determining role in the work of all four Canadians you profile. Was that obvious to you from the get-go?

When I began, I wasn't aware of the degree to which the world is in the process of migration. We're witnessing the greatest migration of displaced people since the Second World War, and it doesn't look like it's ending. That's a direct result of unresolved conflict. What can I say? War is tragic. And it's often wars that people don't decide to engage in. There are masses of people who are victims of decisions made by a small group of power-hungry leaders.



Having spent time with them in the field, what have you learned about the inherent challenges to being an international peace worker?

Kai Brand-Jacobsen uses a metaphor when he talks of peace work being similar to medical work. Your goal is to have a healthy society where people aren't sick, but you don't expect to reach a point where everyone in society is healthy. We provide these services because we want to help get rid of disease, however we can. The peace work model is very similar: conflict is inevitable and that's not what peace workers are trying to get rid of. The problem isn't the conflict; it's when conflict turns to violence. That happens because a culture of violence is engrained in most of our societies, some more than others. When you come out of 20 years of civil war, as they have in Sudan, the instinct is to resolve conflict through violence. Other societies have learned to find other means, and in a sense, that's what their work is – to try and transform the culture of violence into a culture of negotiation. What did our parents say when we had a conflict? "Use your words." It's the basic message we've grown up with in this culture, whether it's anti-bullying or anti-sexual harassment. It's a new paradigm that's slowly emerging in the world, where an aggressive response to conflict is being challenged.

Have we reached the end of an era where countries go to war against each other to resolve conflict?

Yes, I believe so. For the past 20 years, nearly all the wars in the world have been civil wars and ethnic conflicts, and smaller struggles within countries, not between countries. Conflicts that do escalate into war don't get resolved by war anymore. At some point, everywhere in the world, some process of mediation gets put into play. People come to a negotiating table to stop the fighting and work out how to arrange things afterwards. This old model of 'I'm going to war and I'm going to win' – ISIS is challenging it in a way that has changed the paradigm, but it's largely obsolete. In UN peacekeeping, for example, mediation has never been more important, with over 120,000 peacekeepers doing very effective work to resolve various conflict situations around the world. Canada has chosen not to be part of that, but it's still happening.

What do you make of Canada's reduced role in international peace processes and reconciliation?

I think it's misdirected. It's part of the old model of resolving conflict through military force, as opposed to the imperfect system that was in place for many years in Canada, of supporting the UN-mandated peacekeeping missions. Back then, we saw ourselves as a middle power, carving out a different role for ourselves where we would be the go-betweens, so that we wouldn't unequivocally support one side against another as the Conservative government has done in the Israel/Palestine conflict.



Let's imagine Canada decided to shift gears and reengage with the United Nations. What would a more effective Canadian model look like, in your opinion?

There's a whole direction you can go in as a country that says, "while we have an army, an air force and we could bomb ISIS, we're going to build bridges instead." Some countries in the world have introduced the notion of not only having a Minister of Defense, but also a Minister of Peace, as in Costa Rica. That minister supports the introduction of policies favouring peace, both locally and internationally. Perhaps with this kind of model, there would be more support for projects like UN-Habitat in the Congo. Maybe there'd be more support for universities that want to teach these kinds of programs. Maybe there would be more support for something called a Canadian Institute of Peace, which is compatible with the American and European Institutes for Peace. There's an international movement of representatives from about 100 countries who meet every year to advance this cause and encourage their countries to develop ministries of peace. The NDP actually proposed a motion in parliament to that effect. It didn't go anywhere, obviously.

Besides the lack of government support, civilian peace workers find their work largely overlooked by the media. Why is that?

If you don't understand the impact this kind of work has and you're only looking at it in terms of the larger perspective, then this kind of work may seem naïve, because you're associating it with a peace movement or an eventual peace. That always seems so idealistic and unreachable. People who believe in that always seem Pollyannaish and naïve. For an outsider looking at it through that lens, they're not seeing it as the daily grind of trying to push things forward. They're not exposed to the kinds of initiatives peace workers are doing. So they'll hear little fragments of it, and just dismiss it as remnants of another time, or old hippies, or that they must have some religious conviction. The other challenge is that their work usually isn't considered newsworthy. They're working behind the scenes, sitting and talking to people. Talking isn't inherently dramatic or all that fascinating to follow. If peace work could develop the same kind of romance as war, then we might begin to move in the direction of more peace work.

Poring over your filmography, war and peace appear to be issues that have always strongly resonated with you.

Absolutely. My parents came to Canada as refugees; they were survivors of the Holocaust. War was a reality for them – they lost everything before coming here. So notions of war and conflict, power and abuse, and how these historical movements emerge have been particular fascinations of mine for as long as I can remember. All my films have dealt with building bridges between communities, and that's what the peace builders in this documentary do – build bridges through dialogue.

Bonjour! Shalom! (1991), one of my most well-known films, looks at the relationship between Hasidic Jews in Outremont and their French Québécois neighbours. The film created a bridge between two communities in conflict. Taxi Sans Détour (1988) is about Haitian taxi drivers in a conflict over established territory with other taxi drivers, who were threatened by the arrival of this new, all-Black workforce. Asylum (1998) follows refugees coming to Canada to seek asylum over the nearly three years it took for them to be processed by our system. Aller-Retour (1994) was about Mexican farm workers coming to Quebec. So the relationship between the haves and the have-nots – people who are in conflict with others – has always interested me. Rather than taking sides for one or the other, I prefer doing what a mediator does: listen to both sides, and create opportunities for understanding that didn't exist before. Who's right and who's wrong is fundamentally important, in the sense that justice is crucial. But on another level, being able to stop the hurt is a personal motivation. I come from that background, and I've followed it through in different ways.

What do you hope viewers will take away from the film?

There's this huge boulder of cynicism that stands in the way of imagining that the world can be a more peaceful place. What the characters in this film have done is create a bit of a wedge that has moved that boulder a smidgen. Some light shines in, allowing us to believe things could be better in the future. I think it's important, in the face of everything that's going on in the world, to have that kind of hope, because without it, we're powerless. If the film can contribute to shining that light, I would be very happy.

Andrew Marshall

*Mediateur of armed conflicts
(Geneva)*



Expertise: Andrew has over 25 years of international experience and a wealth of expertise in the mediation of armed conflicts, hostage negotiations, emergency humanitarian operations and advising governments on negotiation and peacemaking skills.

Inter Mediate: Inter Mediate is a London-based organization for negotiation and mediation that focuses on the world's most difficult, complex and dangerous conflicts.

In 1999, he was a co-founder of the Center for Humanitarian Dialogue (HDC) in Geneva. He is also the senior advisor on mediation at Crisis Management Initiative (CMI), a Finnish independent non-profit organization that works to resolve conflict and to build sustainable peace. The son of a Canadian diplomat, Andrew grew up in Ottawa but travelled widely, spending the early part of his career working as a humanitarian in East Africa for the United Nations. It was this humanitarian work that allowed him to hone his skills as a mediator. Getting much needed food aid into rebel-controlled territories, for one, required delicate negotiations with rebel leaders.

Most recently, he has also been named Senior Advisor to the newly formed European Institute for Peace.

Andrew on the importance of building trust:

“I learned just how important it was to put politics on the back burner while we talked about transportation and time frames and food deliveries. Of course, it was all about politics, but you had to put that aside and work on building relationships and trust. You had to learn how to listen to their complaints and patiently hear out their grievances. After doing that for a few years, the move to mediation work was a very natural one. I had learned that the most effective way to negotiate was to focus on people’s basic needs first and only then, after hearing them out, would I begin to talk politics. That lesson has served me very well as a mediator with rebel groups.”

Andrew on the fragile nature of peace agreements:

“Mediation is not a new thing. It has been practiced for centuries. However, the last decades in this field have seen a change in mediation practices, in the sense that more conflicts have been sustainably solved through this negotiation instrument. This is due to the international pressure given to conflict parties to settle the disputes peacefully. But mediated peace agreements are so very fragile. Conflicts and thus also peace agreements are often taking place in countries that are simultaneously experiencing changes in every aspect of the society – politically, economically and socially. Subtle changes in the societies make the conflicts and their expected outcomes more complex.”

Director Garry Beitel on Andrew:

“Andrew’s work happens mostly in secret: he meets rebel groups and builds their confidence. Same with governments. The things that happen can’t be shared in public, because people are making compromises they wouldn’t want others in their movement or government aware of. They don’t want the negotiation process revealed, because it jeopardizes their interests. So that posed a challenge for the film. But what I realized when I was in Geneva and Andrew was showing me his cache of photos, was that I could [include him in the documentary] without filming those negotiations, because his collection of photos gave you that sense of authenticity. He’s the real McCoy. After 20 years of doing this kind of work, Andrew has a vision. With him, there’s no hype. What you see is what you get. He’s not trying to convince you of anything. He just wants to share what he’s learned.”



Tiffany Easthom

Nonviolent Peaceforce

Area of involvement: South Sudan



(South Sudan was created in 2011 following 21 years of civil war with Sudan. Since December 2013, another civil war is being waged in this new country)

Nonviolent Peaceforce: Nonviolent Peaceforce is an international NGO comprised of a federation of 94 member organizations hailing from around the world. The NGO's aim is to train an unarmed, international civilian protection force, which can be dispatched to conflict zones at the request of local groups in order to protect human rights, defend people using non-violent means, create a dialogue and find peaceful resolutions to conflicts.

About Tiffany: Tiffany Easthom has been the South Sudan Country Director for Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) since 2010. She heads a team of 150 unarmed international and local peacekeepers. Their job is to prevent and resolve armed conflict and provide direct protection to civilians under threat.

Tiffany grew up in northern British Columbia. She holds a Bachelor's Degree in Justice Studies and a Master's Degree in Human Security and Peacebuilding from Royal Roads University in Victoria, B.C. Before coming to South Sudan in 2010, she did similar work in Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Uganda. Tiffany is committed to the practice of unarmed civilian peacekeeping as a tool for reducing violence and protecting civilians in situations of violent conflict.

In Sept of this year, Tiffany moved to Beirut, Lebanon where she is heading up Nonviolent Peaceforce's new initiative to offer direct protection to civilians affected by the ongoing civil war in Syria.

Tiffany on the underestimated value of civilian peacekeeping:

"Unarmed civilians have been successfully 'keeping the peace' in situations of violent conflict all over the world, and their numbers are increasing. We rely solely on dialogue with the armed actors themselves to help them behave in ways that will reduce violence and protect civilians. Our approach depends on building relationships of mutual trust and understanding. Our peacekeepers live and work in the communities they protect because it's crucial to build the capacity of the local community to protect itself. By engaging with our peacekeepers, communities learn to develop skills and programs to keep them safe for the long term."

Tiffany on how different contexts warrant different strategies:

"Wars are being fought on the rooftop of apartment buildings, from the windows of suburban homes – things like scorched earth policies we see all over the world. Civilian installations being targeted, schools, water points being poisoned or destroyed, crops being taken out, so the impact on civilians has escalated exponentially over time. Whereas if you look statistically at the beginning of the 20th century, the majority of fatalities in conflicts were soldiers and armed actors. Fast forward 100 years and the majority of fatalities are civilians. The context has shifted, so it's only logical that the way we approach peace keeping and civilian protection shifts as well."

Director Garry Beitel on Tiffany:

"Tiffany has this wonderful energy and fabulous laugh. When I went to see her as part of my research in South Sudan, I loved the workshop she was doing. I love the relationship she has with her colleagues. She has a staff of 150 people. It started out small, but they've been very successful at what they do. Tiffany runs the organization, but also gets involved hands-on with the work that needs to be done. She's very conscious of her role as an outsider, and the way in which her organization will eventually no longer be needed, as they're training locals to do the work they themselves carry out."

Kai Brand-Jacobsen

PATRIR



Area of involvement: Kurdistan, Northern Iraq



(More than one million Iraqis have fled towards Kurdistan, in Northern Iraq)

Peace Action Training and Research Institute of Romania

(PATRIR): Founded in 2001, PATRIR is an international NGO based in Cluj-Napoca, Romania. The institute's fundamental principles are non-violence, conflict transformation, the promotion of human rights through information and awareness-raising through solutions-oriented, social, political and economic analysis.

About Kai: Kai Brand-Jacobsen is a practicing peace worker and founder and director of the Peace Action, Training and Research Institute of Romania (PATRIR) – for which he now the Director of their Department of Peace Operations. He is a global consultant, advisor and practitioner on peace building, conflict transformation, war-to-peace transitions, and post-war reconciliation and healing. Since leaving home in Ottawa at the age of 17, Kai has travelled to over 90 countries – at the invitation of governments, inter-governmental organizations, UN agencies, local organizations and communities.

Since 1996, he has provided more than 250 training programs in peace building, development, and constructive conflict transformation to more than 5,000 participants in 36 countries, and has been invited to give more than 600 public talks. Kai is presently involved in peace building projects in Nepal, Northern Iraq, Cyprus and Lebanon as well as his ongoing training workshops for mid and high-level peace practitioners, which take place throughout the year in Romania and in London.

Kai on the hardships he's been exposed to:

"I have held a 9-year-old child who had been shot while he was dying. I have worked in communities where women had been exposed to mass rape and spoken with survivors. I have been in countries all over the world that have been affected by war and it is seeing what it does to people – when your father is killed, when you've been injured. Seeing so many examples in the most difficult situations... When you use peace building and effective approaches to dealing with conflict, you can find ways of transforming even the most difficult ones."

Kai on those who dismiss peace building as naïve:

"There are many people who think that to talk about peace building in the situation we have in the world is naïve. What I would say is that you can only believe that if you haven't been exposed or if you don't understand what is involved in working with conflicts."

Kai on funds allotted to weaponization:

"One of the things that drives me is the reality that today, we spend more than 1.76 trillion dollars a year just to produce weapons. That's more than 3 million dollars a minute on the production of weapons and the maintenance of armies. If we were to use even 1/1000th of that to deal with real issues and needs and to deal with conflicts effectively, we could dramatically reduce the incidence of armed violence in the world."

Director Garry Beitel on Kai:

"Kai has been doing this for about 20 years. He left Canada as a 17 year old who had just finished high school. He got involved from the ground up and built his expertise. He took classes in Norway with Johan Galtung, considered the father of Peace & Conflict Studies. But Kai also comes from a diplomatic family; his grandfather was a diplomat, his father taught international relations at the University of Ottawa, he grew up with this milieu of international work, so it was natural for him to step into it. He also set up his institute in Romania, and that's been the base of his operations ever since. He was an obvious character, as he's very inspiring, passionate and articulate."



Oumar Sylla

ONU-Habitat

Area of involvement: Democratic Republic of Congo



(In the Congo (DRC), nearly 6 million people have been killed during successive wars between 1996 and 2014)

UN-Habitat: Founded in 1978, the United Nations Human Settlements Program (UN-Habitat) is the main agency responsible for overseeing all activities related to human settlements development within the greater UN family. UN-Habitat promotes the sustainable development of human settlements through the implementation of appropriate policies, the creation of knowledge and the strengthening of partnerships between governments and civil society.

About Oumar: Since 2009, Oumar Sylla has served as the Chief Technical Advisor for UN Habitat's Land Dispute Mediation program in Eastern Congo. Working with a staff of 15 Congolese mediators, Oumar oversees the resolution of conflicts related primarily to the return of displaced refugees. With a relative peace, refugees are returning and claiming ancestral rights to land occupied in their absence by people who were themselves forced from their own lands elsewhere. The work of Oumar Sylla's UN mediation team in the Eastern Congo is particularly fragile with the absence of a legitimate security infrastructure in the region.

Oumar is originally from Senegal but for the five years we were making the film, he was a permanent resident of Canada. His wife and two young children were living in Ottawa. Oumar visited every few months. He applied for Canadian citizenship but was refused because he did not live permanently in Canada. He paid taxes in Canada, a country he chose to live in because of the values and way of life with which he identifies, but he was not prepared to give up his UN work, at this point in his life, in order to acquire Canadian citizenship. In May 2014, he was named the Senior Advisor, Human Settlements at the UN-Habitat's Regional Office For Africa in Nairobi. His wife and children have joined him there.

Oumar on his responsibility to those living in distress:

"I have always wanted to work on behalf of vulnerable populations, for the reestablishment of peace and the transformation of conflict. It is important to help populations who live in distress, to bring them hope to survive and assistance that will allow them to believe in a better future. That's what keeps me in this job. I tell myself that if I abandoned this work because of personal and family problems, that would create many more victims at the level of the local communities than at the level of my family. If I abandon the local community who've found hope in my work, that means dooming them to an uncertain future."

Oumar on why his job isn't to resolve the conflict itself:

"It's the parties who decide to resolve their problems or not to. What we try to do is facilitate dialogue between the parties in conflict, to bring them to find a compromise. When I joined UN Habitat, I had this idea that when we intervened, we provided a solution to the problem. But once I was in the field and became aware of the conflicts, I realized we don't have the obligation of results, we have the obligation of means. You are in a position to counsel the parties to come to a solution, but solutions to problems don't depend on us, they depend on the parties in conflict. Even if the solution is adopted, it might not be sustainable, and mediation is not always effective in finding sustainable solutions. Unfortunately, many of the parties in a conflict still prefer to resolve their conflict with violence."

Director Garry Beitel on Oumar:

“Oumar gave me the opportunity to follow one process over a long period of time. He’s really articulate, has a great voice to listen to, and [at the time of shooting] ran a staff of 15 mediators doing this kind of work in the Congo. They were being slowly effective, understanding full well that the process takes time. They intrinsically understood that the work is important and leads somewhere, but doesn’t necessarily have to yield immediate results. For one, they’re keenly aware that mediations that fail pick up again a year or two later.”



In Pursuit of Peace

A film by Garry Beitel

Produced by

Barry Lazar

Cinematography by

Philippe Lavalette

Edited by

Dominique Sicotte

Sound

André Boisvert

Benoit Dame

Catherine Van de Donckt

Original music

Olivier Alary

Graphics

Eric Grice

<http://www.reframe-films.com>

<https://www.facebook.com/poursuitedelapaix.film>

Credits

Screenplay and direction

GARRY BEITEL

Producer

BARRY LAZAR

Director of photography

Philippe Lavalette

Sound recording

André Boisvert

Editing

Dominique Sicotte

With the participation of

Tiffany Eastholm,
Nonviolent Peaceforce

Kai Brand-Jacobsen,
Peace Action Training and
Research Institute of
Romania
(PATRIR)

Andrew Marshall

Oumar Sylla,
UN Habitat, Programme de
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fonciers

Additional camera

German Gutierrez (Iraq)
Carols Ferrand (Ottawa)

Original music

Olivier Alary

Musicians

Johannes Malfatti: Kalimba -
Percussion
Jean-Christophe Lizotte -
Cello
Warren Auld - Cora
Erik Hove - Saxophone
Olivier Alary - Guitar

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Van Der Donckt

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Cadotte

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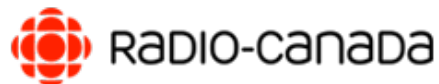
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