



# CRITERIA FOR THE CHOICE OF NONVIOLENT ACTION



Working Group on  
**Christian Nonviolence**  
Christianity and Justice Research Center



Centre d'estudis  
**Cristianisme i Justícia**

*"Move Nonviolence"* is an educational commitment to initiate a process of personal transformation before the conflicts we face in our times, creating nonviolent strategies that free up situations that are at an impasse. This tool consists of a series of videos accompanied by the corresponding educational units so that the teaching guides have the material and direction for their work. The dynamics of this document are classified into sections and their topics in accordance with their appearance in the video. In some sections we suggest suitable options for each end-user profile. This proposal is intended for groups who can be accompanied by someone with a capacity for in-depth reflection on each subject.

Acquire all the material

**[www.movenonviolence.net](http://www.movenonviolence.net)**

Each unit plan incorporates a series of associated material accessible from the project website: [www.movenonviolence.net](http://www.movenonviolence.net). The material of this specific unit is found in: <https://movenonviolence.net/U5>.



## Breaking the ice

This activity is designed for participants of ages 18 and older. Evil can come in many forms and it also resides within us. Anyone exposed to violence can come to reach uni-

maginable forms of aggression and cruelty. This can be seen in the studies on the effects of exposure to violent audiovisual media:

"Exposure [to violent videogames] is positively associated with heightened levels of aggression in young adults and children, in experimental and non-experimental designs, and in males and females"<sup>1</sup>

"Exposure to media violence immediately increases the likelihood of aggressive behaviour for children and adults in the short run and leads to aggressive behaviour in children in the long term"<sup>2</sup>

1. ANDERSON, C. A., BUSHMAN, B. J. (2001). «Effects of Violent Video Games on Aggressive Behavior, Aggressive Cognition, Aggressive Affect, Physiological Arousal, and Prosocial Behavior: A Meta-Analytic Review of the Scientific Literature». *Psychological Science*, 12(5), p. 358.
2. HUESMANN, L. R. (2007). «The Impact of Electronic Media Violence: Scientific Theory and Research». *The Journal of Adolescent Health: Official Publication of the Society for Adolescent Medicine*, 41(6 Suppl 1), p. 9.

We invite you to view this conference, which includes photos of violence and cruelty.

In groups, work on some of the ideas described by Zimbardo. You may replay a given passage, stop the video and discuss any of the slides of particular interest:

- According to him, what factors can make us become violent and evil?
- How does he demonstrate that all people can be corrupted by violence?
- What does he suggest doing, to turn this process around?
- Regarding what he says about “potential heroes in waiting”, does this relate to the people that Gandhi referred to as

satyagrahis and whom today we think of as people who lead nonviolent lives? How can we train ourselves to live by these vital principles so that they come up spontaneously?

The exposure to evil can corrupt anyone. Because you will be exposed to it during the nonviolent struggle, it is important not to be naive and to design an effective plan of nonviolent action that takes into account the real situation and the proportions of evil that you will be up against. You can finish the introduction with this brief appeal to the use of nonviolence as a source of inner strength.

## 01 The psychology of evil



## 02 Nonviolence: Your Inner Power





## Non-cooperation, despite the consequences

It is fundamental to never cooperate with injustice, even if this means having to suffer more. The case of the Sumilao farmers offers us a model: 13 years of nonviolent resistance until they finally recovered their land. See:

[04 The Sumilao farmers, a decade after they marched for their rights](#)

### [05 Lakaw Sumilao](#)

1. IDENTIFY the situation of injustice. It is unjust if it does not protect the fundamental human rights of everyone.
2. You are probably not the first: FIND OUT what actions have been carried out thus far: who has faced this conflict thus far and how.
3. What was the OBJECTIVE of these actions and what MEANS did they involve? Is this a good direction to continue to follow?
4. What DIRECT OR COLLATERAL DAMAGES did they have to face? What people have suffered the negative consequences of those nonviolent actions? Had those people voluntarily assumed the consequences beforehand?
5. It is important to be AWARE OF THE PAIN that these events have caused for each person, while at the same time understanding the freedom that they have also brought about as a conscious, desired, accepted and empowered vehicle of nonviolent resistance.
6. ASSESS THE RISK of each of the sides involved. On the one hand, what is at risk for those who commit the injustice; and on the other hand, what is at risk for those who have undertaken non-cooperative actions (in terms of food, work, housing,

land, health, life, etc.). Now think about HOW FAR YOU ARE WILLING TO GO if it means a risk for yourself.

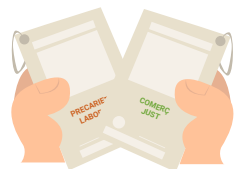
7. Finally, DECIDE on your form of non-cooperation or nonviolent contribution in the face of this injustice, while assuming the consequences of your actions.

### ■ CHILDREN

Present the children with a hypothetical situation: Most of the kids play football on the school playground, taking up the entire playground. Some of the children don't want to play, meaning that they have less playground space and end up hanging around talking on the outside of the field or playing in a very small area. A few days ago, some of the kids began to feel this was unfair. Apply the seven steps described above to change the situation.

### ■ YOUTH AND ADULTS

Think of three past cases of injustice: from your neighbourhood, from your company, institution or school, and from your personal life. Now, within each of these situations, try to remain consistent in terms of your goal and the means you use to achieve it. In groups, apply the seven steps mentioned above and take decisions. Share your conclusions with the group.



# 3

## Re-integrating the adversary

Yet at the same time, you must always persist in the attempt to re-integrate the adversary, with gestures that can connect with their humanity. If both sides don't gain something in some way, the conflict will go on, mainly because there will be resentment. We propose a few guidelines so as not to have to speak of the adversary and to be able to speak of the person directly.

### ■ CHILDREN

Read a traditional tale, focus your attention on some evil character (a demon, dragon, beast, etc.) and describe the positive attitudes of that being in the story. If you can't find any, think about how you could change the story by bringing those kinds of attitudes into it: having humanising attitudes doesn't change its role as the adversary! Now, put yourself into his/her shoes: What sorts of needs must the villain have had to make him/her act that way? Taking what you've learned thus far, rewrite the story in the form of a play so that the needs of both the hero and the villain are met in the solution (win-win). Act out your version of the story in front of other groups or family members, to show them ways of including the adversary and end conflicts.

### ■ YOUTH

Watch the Japanese animated film "Spirited Away" (2001), a fantasy story full of symbols. Pay close attention to No-Face, the faceless spirit and his meaning (here is a summary of the scenes): [06 Who or What is No Face](#)

What are his traits? Does he resemble any of the destructive dynamics of the world today? What does his indigestion mean? We always see evil in specific people: as a personal being, what are his needs? Why does he always follow Chihiro? How does Chihiro treat him? Evaluate Chihiro's role in reintegrating No-Face. In one scene, Chihiro asserts: "He's only bad in the bath house, he needs to get out of there". If the "bath house" is understood to be a brothel, why does Chihiro say that the solution resides in having No-Face leave the place? At what other times does Chihiro wish the monster well? Think about the role of the perseverance of goodness within nonviolence.

### ■ ADULTS

Look back at the three cases of injustice in the last chapter. Focus your attention on that adversary. Aside from the injustice committed, does that person or his/her group have any good traits? The greater your distance from the unfair situation, the more easily you will find those traits: could you imagine good traits in those who mistreated the Sumilao farmers? Write a list of the traits that make the relationship with them more human (the way they care for their children or their parents, etc.). We are all adversaries for other people and at the same time we are adversaries for ourselves: now think of three of your own traits that make you more human. Why don't you feel that the adversary can also have traits that make him/ her more human?

# 4

## The power of the base to change

	Strong sense of responsibility for the problem	Weak sense of responsibility for the problem
Strong sense of responsibility for the solution	Moral model	Compensatory model
Weak sense of responsibility for the solution	Enlightenment model	Medical model

Everyone who endures the conflict has the power to change the situation, regardless of what the leaders or directors decide. Countless laws have changed thanks to the efforts of civil movements. As regards knowing how to empower and accompany groups, it is advisable to understand the levels of responsibility described by Brickman (1982) in situations of conflict:

- Moral model: “I feel VERY responsible for my problem, and the solution GREATLY depends on me”. Applied to alcoholism and dependencies.
- Compensatory model: “I feel LITTLE responsible for my problem, and the solution GREATLY depends on me”. Applied to social leaders who wish to empower groups.
- Enlightenment model: “I feel VERY responsible for my problem, but I feel that the solution depends very LITTLE on me”. The feeling of helplessness leads these individuals to blame themselves and to wait for outside help. It is important to strengthen their sense of responsibility in the solution to the problem, so as not to infantilize the individuals.
- Medical model: “I feel LITTLE responsible for my problem, and I feel that the solution depends LITTLE on me”. Total fragility when it comes to taking control of their own lives (e.g. homeless...). This requires a process to strengthen them at every level: psychologically; their reading of reality; and their skills.

### CHILDREN

Some of your classmates don’t play fairly. They bother the other kids and seek enjoyment by irritating them. What measures can you take to prevent them from bothering your classmates if you also want to avoid hurting the aggressors? Should you also inform an adult authority? How should you help the victims to make them stronger and encourage them to join you in the nonviolent fight?

### YOUTH AND ADULTS

Imagine that you are the ombudsperson of your town, and you have been appointed by the town council. On your first day of public service, you have received three people: one has complained about noise in the public space; another, about the young people who take drugs at the entrance to his building; and a third person, who has complained about the weekly “drunken madness” in the public square. As the ombudsperson, what would you do? You can fuel their fires further, give them advice, delegate or send those affected to the corresponding institutions, etc. Will your attitude resemble the role of an indulging and childish person or that of an empowered and independent citizen? Could you apply the Brickman models to the three cases, to determine which way you should guide each person?

1. BRICKMAN, P., CARULLI, V., KARUZA, J., COATES, D., COHN, E. i KIDDER, L. (1982). «Models of Helping and Coping». *American Psychologist*. 37. pp. 368-384.



# 5

## Group struggle

When injustice is confronted seriously, it is important to get more people involved in the nonviolent struggle. Creating a group and putting real effort into bringing the group together will give you greater chances for success in your campaign. Teach them to practice the personal work of inner nonviolence and to gain self-control by engaging in activities together.

### ■ CHILDREN

Have the children form a line and stand quietly. Whispering in their ears, one by one, they are given the name of an animal, assigning each animal to several people. Have them all move apart, to different areas of the room. Ask them all to imitate the sounds of their respective animals, and at the same time tell them to pay attention to the other sounds, as they must find the other animals of their kind among their classmates and group themselves accordingly. At the end, have everyone sit down and discuss the exercise. Did the groups with the most animals have a louder voice all together? And what does that tell us, if we want to defend those that have no voice?

### ■ YOUTH

Four volunteers are chosen. The other members of the group sit on the floor in such a way that they are spread out around the room, and they are quiet the entire time. The objective will be for the volunteer who has the ball to get it over to the other end of the room without touching anyone seated on the floor. However, each of the four volun-

teers has a disability: one is blind (he/ she is blindfolded): that person can only lead the ball with his/her foot. Another is deaf-mute (he/ she is wearing earplugs), and because this person can see but cannot say anything, he /she will try to keep the ball from getting out of control and hitting anyone. Another volunteer is mute, but since this person can see, he/ she can touch the blind volunteer on the back to guide him/ her a bit. Finally, the fourth volunteer has no hands (hands behind him/ her) and is crippled (seated at one end of the room and cannot move), and from far away, he/she must use words to guide the blind volunteer, along with the mute volunteer, who is guiding him/her through touch. At the end of the activity, discuss the experiment. How did you all feel? Did the goal entail a task for the entire group, each with his/ her own talents? What would have happened had one of the four volunteers been on bad terms with another? How do you look after the cohesion, identity and motivation of a nonviolent group? When we fight together, we can combine each person's special talents and skills to join forces and achieve greater milestones.

### ■ ADULTS

The group is asked to stand close together, forming a small circle, and they are given a mess of tangled string. The members of the group are blindfolded and must use speech to untangle the ball of string by feel until the mess of string is all sorted out. It is a group interest to straighten out the mess, and priority must be placed on this over individual interests.

## Analysis and direct-action planning

To create strategies, it is important to analyse the conflict thoroughly and anticipate the consequences of the actions that aim to end such conflict. Seek advice and discuss this as a group: are you willing to assume the consequences of these actions? Your cause will awaken sympathies if you are consistent in accepting only peaceful ways: the action of the protest is not one of vengeance, but rather a means to raise awareness while including the adversary and changing the game rules. When planning out a strategy, it is good to remember that in a conflict there are usually:

- Those who defend legality (which is not always fair). The Law is established as a social agreement and must be adhered to. Those who defend legality often say that anyone who dissents is “outside of the law”, and under the pretext of combatting all illegalities, they usually aim to squelch dissenters.
- Those who defend legitimacy, often during a phase prior to legality. They want what they believe to be legitimate to become the law. Therefore, they respect the law. Legitimacy seeks change in keeping with the principles of dignity and justice in areas that the law does not yet cover.

When a law or legality is unfair, being fair means defending what is legitimate. Nonviolent protesters usually fight from the perspective of legitimacy, due to the lack of legal tools to defend an issue of justice. The agencies and individuals that hold the power usually fight from the perspective of legality. Yet the law does not belong exclusively to those in power; it belongs to everyone, and legitimacy and law are equally important. For this reason, anyone who fights for a given issue of legitimacy must thoroughly adhere to the laws in force. When being judged for disobedience

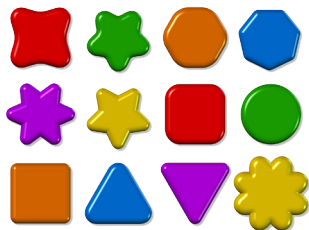
(1922), Gandhi demanded that the judge either resign from his post as he considered the system to be unjust, or sentence him to the severest punishment, in compliance with the unjust law that was in force. (Watch the scene from the film *Gandhi* (1982), minute 1:51:07). Disobedience to an unjust law must assume the disciplinary consequences that go with it. Enduring the suffering and doing so in mass will make the unjust system totter still more, so that one day, even if this be in the distant future, legitimacy will become law.

### ■ CHILDREN AND YOUTH

You are a group of students that believe that a section of the school regulations does not take into account important rights. What legitimate rights are not being recognised? Select a case and work on how to present its legitimacy and how to fight to incorporate it into the law. In small groups, build an argument to defend the elements that justify its legitimacy, and describe how you plan to fight to make it legal.

### ■ ADULTS

People's rights are being violated in your neighbourhood, and you believe that it is legitimate to defend them. Divide yourselves into two groups: one group will choose the case they wish to defend and argue the legitimacy of it. The other group will represent legality and try to block what the others claim to be legitimate from ever becoming legal. Each group must defend its ideas with every means possible, but only the group in favour of the legitimacy is obligated to uphold nonviolence in all the actions that it plans. How will you handle this? Who will get further? Take turns presenting strategies and agreed actions.



To be efficient, group activities need structure: a design of tasks and a distribution of responsibilities in keeping with the skills and motivation of the group's members. In the case of nonviolent resistance to defend rights, the qualities to be evaluated can range from a knowledge of the law and theory, the peaceful nature of a given person and empathy in situations of dialogue or at the front line of a protest; to artistic creativity, the organisational skills and leadership.

### ■ CHILDREN

Choose one of the two proposals below:

1. Based on this video, as a group discuss how you are capable of integrating a person who is different from you, while valuing the person's peculiarities: [07 Lamb](#)
2. We propose a fun activity with inter-related and interspersed tasks. Here, each task requires a unique gift or skill. This might be speed, lightness, visual acuity or being good at distributing tasks, strength, height, knowledge, mathematic aptitude, courage, balance, being good with their hands, etc. The children form teams of 4

to 8 people according to the number of tasks to be performed, unless there are tasks that require more than one person. The children are told the tasks that they will have to carry out, one after another, in the least amount of time possible. In half of the groups, the internal assignment of the tasks will be done randomly. The other groups will distribute the tasks internally, in keeping with the specific skills of each team member. Preferably, all the groups should compete simultaneously. It is advisable that the non-randomly selected groups wear some distinctive sign that reinforces the lesson. Once the treasure hunt is over, everyone will come together to share the results and observations and draw conclusions from the experience.

### ■ ADULTS AND YOUTH

There has been an environmental and sanitary disaster in your county and the origin is unknown. A foul odour is invading the area. Fish, trees and plants are dying. Some people are hospitalised, by then they die. There are some suspected causes, but a world of interests, denialism, legal obstacles and threats makes it difficult to act accordingly. What would you do? A) Would you leave it all up to the governmental administrations? B) Do you think that if a lot of you get involved, design different tasks and discerningly distribute them you will be more effective than if you all do the same thing or just a few of you get involved? Would you distribute the tasks at will or would you take into account the peoples' individual skills? What are the advantages of the latter option?

## Strategy for direct action

A good nonviolent action should be surprising, provocative, non-punitive, unexpected and always creative. It is important to prepare all direct actions thoroughly and be ready to accept any consequences that they bring about. Each member of the participating group must clearly know what his / her job is, how to do that job and where he/she must be at all times. It is also essential to plan out in advance alternatives in case there may be antagonistic reactions. And finally, it is vital that the members of the group understand what they are getting into. Moreover, they must be willing to assume any consequences that they might have to face (aggressions, humiliation, fines, prison, etc.).

It is fundamental that all nonviolent strategies:

1. **DEFINE** a clear objective and plan out a realistic methods. This may consist of a schedule of different nonviolent actions (possibly selected from among the 198 actions designed by Gene Sharp<sup>1</sup>), a combination of direct actions and negotiation proposals or others. When designing this roadmap, find a path that aims to win over the heart of the adversary and include them in the solution. Be discerning when distributing the tasks (as mentioned in the chapter above) and constantly evaluate the method (as discussed in the next chapter).
2. **CULTIVATE** the group of activists constantly (chapter 5). There is also an internal strategy: preparing the spirit and identity of the group; promoting motivation, mutual trust among the members, a deep under-

standing of nonviolence, self-control and creativity, among others. Thorough training is essential, particularly at times of defeat.

3. **ANTICIPATE** needs and consequences and be willing and able to face them. Sun Tzu asserted that “tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat”. It is important to create a support group with experts and assistance to set up the logistics, in order to respond to any needs, as well as to appropriately handle any possible consequences.

### ■ CHILDREN, YOUTH, ADULTS

Watch this video and see the way Jamila Raqib presents nonviolent resistance:

#### [08 The secret to effective nonviolent resistance](#)

Select a cause to defend and the corresponding nonviolent response. Organise three groups to act out in a simple way three phases of action: planning (assessment of the reality, objective, method: who will do what and how they will do it), training the group (schedule of meetings, training workshops, meditations or prayer, emblems, motivation and dynamics of trust and confidence...) and the support team (medical, legal and promotional assistants). Be sure to run a general rehearsal, drawing up the strategy, distributing the tasks and practicing the action.



1. SHARP, G. (2014). *From Dictatorship to Democracy. A Conceptual Framework for Liberation* (4th ed.). Boston: The Albert Einstein Institution, pp. 79-86..

# 9

## Ongoing assessment



In nonviolent resistance, the people's motivation can never depend on the success or failure of the outcome. Nevertheless, to properly design a strategy, it is paramount to analyse and assess the new reality generated by each implemented

nonviolent action, to make any necessary improvements at the right time. Anything that is not evaluated can be devaluated.

On the one hand, it is important to be aware of all progress, in order to secure it. On the other hand, it is also vital to understand and accept that we must continue to move forward, despite any difficulties and weaknesses. Every failure forms part of the ultimate success, as it has enabled us to learn. Therefore, it was useful.

In the business world, the SWOT analysis is a strategic planning method to assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of a given project or process. This analysis differentiates between a company's internal factors (strengths and weaknesses) and external factors (opportunities and threats). With the SWOT analysis, the person taking the decisions must determine at each point along the way whether the objective is still achievable following the same strategy. If it does not appear to be achievable, the decisionmaker will have to use a different strategy.

Within this nonviolent assessment, a certain capacity for dialogue and reconciliation will be necessary for an ultimate end to the conflict: we can "open our hand" to the other if we have previously worked internally on our ability to include him/ her and if the strategy was not punitive, but rather aimed to prevent defeat for both sides.

### ■ CHILDREN AND YOUTH

In groups, discuss the different methods that you know for ongoing student evaluation: through exams, projects, acquisition of skills and attitudes, and others. In each of these, imagine that such method would never have taken place (for example, that the kids had never taken an exam in their lives). Think about this realistically. It is important that everyone gets to express what he/ she would have done in class, at home, etc., for days and years. Would we have the knowledge and the skills that we have today?

### ■ ADULTS

We propose a film debate: watch the documentary [09 Five Broken Cameras](#) (2013) and imagine that you are an advisory committee and you've been hired to offer an assessment: apply the SWOT analysis at each step of the nonviolent resistance that they undertake, and write a report with the results. Would you have kept the resistance going in the same direction that they did in the end?

# 10

## Perseverance of authenticity

One of the key principles of nonviolence is the perseverance of the authenticity of both the participants and the actions or strategies.

- As regards the PARTICIPANTS, authenticity means being deeply honest, consistent and capable of questioning the purity of your own intentions at all times: questioning whether your own attitudes exclude violence, whether your goal is for ever-yone to win (inclusion of the other side).
- As to the ACTIONS AND STRATEGIES, authenticity means cleansing them of vested interests, hidden vengeance or any other violent characteristics that might otherwise taint them. The hope for ultimate success does not depend on the number of failures, but rather on always choosing means that are in line with the objective, which is Peace.

As Gandhi affirmed, “our reward is in the effort, not the outcome. A total effort is full victory”. The time factor cannot spur us to lose our patience. We must obstinately base our perseverance on our cultivated spirituality (rooting ourselves in the meaning of life and love), rather than on the outcome. This way, our fight for the cause becomes indestructible. History is full of examples of discoveries that have required perseverance: Edison failed hundreds of times when inventing the lightbulb.

### ■ CHILDREN

Watch this video: [10 Como debe ser apoya-do un compañero](#). Despite the poor picture

definition, it shows the perseverance and authenticity of someone who connects with skills that he didn’t know he had. In three groups, analyse the situation from three perspectives: 1) You’re the kid; 2) You’re the parents; 3) You’re the teammates. What do you think the people of each perspective feel: when he doesn’t achieve his goal; when he is cheered on by his peers; and when he finally achieves his goal?

### ■ YOUTH

Choose a struggle (social, personal, group, imaginary, etc., any struggle) and form two randomly selected groups: some support the struggle and others try to hinder it. The guide will have to lead a debate: each group will have to think out loud as they imagine how they would defend or hinder the struggle, while the guide takes notes of the details to measure the authenticity and perseverance. At the end, the guide will ask the groups which one they feel has been more perseverant and why. The guide will then contrast the two groups on this point, based on his/her notes.

### ■ ADULTS

Working in groups, think of and share two real events in the life of each person: one event in which you persevered and another in which you did not. What was it that made you persevere and what kept you from doing so in those cases? What did you feel? Finally, bring everyone together to debate on the introduction of this chapter.

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**A project of**

**CJ** Centre d'estudis  
**Cristianisme i Justícia**

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**Christian Nonviolence**  
Christianity and Justice Research Center

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