“Interfaith Mothers” Secure Release of Child Hostages in Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone witnessed the start of an 11-year war in 1991 that enabled the rebel army Revolutionary United Front to recruit child soldiers, break down information channels, and commit grotesque acts of violence. In the midst of such conflict, the government of Sierra Leone struggled to garner the credibility needed to negotiate with these violent rebels.

With the support of RfP, religious leaders formed the RfP Interreligious Council of Sierra Leone (IRCSL) and took on the role of an objective third-party. The Women of Faith Network played an integral role supporting the peacebuilding efforts of IRCSL.

Unarmed women of faith intervened on behalf of children held hostage by the rebels. Approaching the rebels as “interfaith mothers,” the women secured the release of 50 captured children. This opened a true channel for negotiations that resulted in IRCSL’s historic involvement at the Lomé Peace Accord in 1999.

In the following three years, IRCSL conducted a human rights and peace education project designed to contribute to a nationwide dialogue on human rights and the establishment of Sierra Leone’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, to which Bishop J.C. Humper, president of IRCSL, was appointed chairperson.

Since then, RfP’s IRCSL has forged a unique reputation as “moral guarantors of peace” among the nation’s religious communities, political leaders, and civil society organizations. IRCSL has continued to play an objective, third-party role in government councils and has expanded its reach to currently include hundreds of religious leaders acting to promote peace among throughout the country.

As of 2019, the women continue to lead many of IRCSL projects, and 80 women have been trained as “Peace Ambassadors” throughout the country. This comprehensive training, focusing on the areas of peace messaging social cohesion; the link between peace and development; and democracy and democratization, has positioned those trained as critical ambassadors for peace in their communities.