



Image: Tall Nates

Inspiring teachers and students – The Change Makers Programme

by Angela Odah, RLS Programme Manager,
Youth and Politics in Nigeria

"Nigeria is literally sitting on a time bomb and the Change Makers Training Programme is a wakeup call to action". This was the comment of a participant at the first Change Makers Training Programme (CMP) hosted by the Academy of the American University of Nigeria (AUN) Yola, Adamawa state, with support from the South African Holocaust and Genocide Centre in Johannesburg, the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung West Africa and many others.

The CMP is a youth leadership programme offered as an extracurricular activity for student leaders and their teachers. It strives to build resilience to violence, help develop the necessary skills to challenge the idea of extremism and encourage participants to become up standers and change makers in their society.

The Change Makers Training Programme showcased an exhibition on the Holocaust, the system of Apartheid, and the Rwandan genocide.

Using selected case studies, it also highlighted the moral choices made by girls, boys, women and men who were perpetrators, up standers, bystanders, collaborators and rescuers, and the consequences of their choices. The training was facilitated by survivors of the 1994 Rwandan genocide that led to the killing of over 800,000 Tutsis and Hutus; and second and third generation survivors of the Holocaust, in which over six million European Jews were killed by Nazi-Germany and collaborators, who shared their stories of survival, forgiveness and reconciliation.

Renowned writer, journalist and professor of literature, Professor Boubacar Boris Diop, spoke about Genocide Denial, referencing his book on the Rwandan Genocide, *Murambi: The Book of Bones*, set during the April 1994 killings in Rwanda, which was one of the swiftest and most horrific killing sprees of the 20th century. He shared his hopes and fears for peace in Africa springing from the lessons from Rwanda. Diop said the last century was the most bloody in human history with the First World War claiming between 37-40 million lives, the Second World War claiming between 50-80 million lives and millions more lost in massacres in Eastern Europe, China, Algeria, Vietnam, Turkey, Madagascar, Cameroon, the Nigerian Civil war, etc.

Diop cautioned that the Rwandan genocide did not just happen all of a sudden. There was a long period of preparation and several genocides before 1994. Preparation is an intellectual matter. Inspiration came from the elite and the ordinary people became the foot soldiers, killing with knives and matches. The media was deeply involved in the propaganda, with radio transmissions and the newspapers telling the masses what to do. They popularized the *Ten Commandments of the Hutus* that promoted discrimination and killing of the Tutsis and liberal Hutus. He added that in genocide denial, the perpetrator kills twice, the actual killing and then the silence. He warned that if Africa does not want a repeat of the Rwandan Genocide, we need to know what happened and how it happened. He recalled that when he visited Rwanda in 1998, no one was speaking about it. One of the lessons from Rwanda is that people need to take personal responsibility for their actions.



Image: Tali Nates

Finally, Diop expressed fears about Nigeria and Senegal where ethnicity and religion are being used to fan the embers of disunity. He hopes that the Change Makers Training Programme will inspire young leaders to become change makers and peace makers in their communities and countries.

About the Change Makers Programme (CMP)

The Change Makers Programme was initiated during a session of the Salzburg Global Seminar in December 2016. During the meeting participants from South Africa and Rwanda decided to develop an educational project to encourage learning from history's difficult past by analysing the Holocaust, the 1994 genocide in Rwanda and Apartheid in South Africa.

The twenty hour interactive educational programme promotes tolerance, pluralism and counter-extremism aimed at the African continent. The CMP training at the AUN Academy, Yola, was jointly facilitated by Tali Nates and Courtneigh Bernstein both of the Johannesburg Holocaust and Genocide Centre, and the team of Preventing Crimes Against Humanity (AEGIS), Rwanda, led by Freddy

Mutanguha, Ruhumuriza Jean-Nepo and Marc Gwamaka.

Twenty six teachers and thirty six students of the Academy of the American University of Nigeria were trained from 26 September - 2 October. Some of the participants described the CMP as the best training they had ever received as it encouraged personal reflection and open-mindedness to appreciate the power of peace advocacy and forgiveness.

They were keen to become peace advocates and change makers in their communities and extend what they had learnt to other schools and communities. They expressed appreciation to the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung West Africa for the support and requested that the exhibition be taken to conflict-prone areas across Nigeria to foster peace and unity.

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