

Jana Burke



The Voice of the Youth for Peace

Demanding acknowledgement of young people's views—Advocacy for the implementation of United Nations accords for peace

Jana Burke, born in 1992, spent a year in India as part of the International Voluntary Service of KURVE Wustrow. When she returned in 2013, she took up degree courses in Comparative Studies of Culture and Religions and later also Peace and Conflict Studies. At the same time, she attended courses to become a trainer in conflict transformation. In recent years, she got actively involved in the "United Network of Young Peacebuilders" and, in 2018 in Marburg, organised the worldwide first academic conference for the implementation of the UN Resolution 2250 on "Youth, Peace & Security". This document demands acknowledgement that young people are making a positive contribution to peace and should be represented in political decision-making processes for peace on a basis of equality.

I'm always asking myself in what kind of a world we'd want to live in the future and, in this context, the concerns of the young generation must not be ignored." Jana Burke is convinced that young people can make a vital contribution to a peaceful world, therefore their views have to be given consideration at the social and political level. That's why the former international volunteer of KURVE Wustrow got involved in the "United Network of Young Peacebuilders" and its advocacy efforts for the implementation of the UN Resolution 2250 on "Youth, Peace & Security". The aim of this accord is to give young people—i.e. those aged from 18 to 29 years—a stronger say in peacebuilding and the related decision-making processes.

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When Jana decided in 2012 to go to India for a year, she had no clear picture as yet of what peacebuilding was all about: "I just wanted to do this, and I definitely wanted to do it with KURVE Wustrow whose views on peace had fully convinced me. I also liked their support programme. The seminars in preparation for my assignment abroad as well as the follow-up courses were simply fantastic."

Jana was sent to the Indian Centre for Environment Education (CEE) and was deployed in the north-eastern region of Assam. First, however, she had to stay in Ahmedabad for

a month since her future working area was considered as unsafe due to armed struggle. After the conflict had died down, she was allowed to work in the city of Guwahati and the whole State of Assam. "This was a totally new experience for me to be immediately confronted with security problems", Jana recalls. "The more so I considered it necessary to do active peacebuilding."

This, however, she initially found lacking at CEE. The organisation rather concentrated on environmental issues and educational work in schools and colleges—for example on how to save water, observe

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effective standards of hygiene and also protect the local tiger and tortoise population. “I still had a very limited picture of peacebuilding at that time”, Jana admits. “Only later did I realise that environmental protection and related educational projects are certainly promoting peace. Nowadays, I view such efforts as elements of nonviolent resistance against the destruction of our natural resources and thus as projects for peace.”

This holistic concept has also determined Jana’s further commitments in the area of peacebuilding. Parallel to her comparative studies of culture and religions, she took up courses to become a trainer for conflict transformation. “In the Newsletter of KURVE Wustrow, I came across a ‘Betzavta’ seminar

in Denmark, and I was really overwhelmed by this mind-blowing method”, Jana states full of enthusiasm.

“Betzavta” means “Together” in Hebrew. With this method, developed in Israel, conflicts can be dealt with in a particularly creative way. It is tested in interactive seminars based on the participants’ experience and allowing constant reflection as well as open-ended results. The goal is acknowledgement that all human beings have an unequivocal right to free development. Jana applies the methods she has acquired in her peace seminars also as a free-lance diversity trainer for the German Employees’ Academy with the aim of reducing discrimination in administrative institutions. For her, attitudes like racism and sexism are clear manifestations of violence and have to be counteracted by nonviolent resistance.

When Jana heard about the United Nations Resolution on “Youth, Peace & Security” which was adopted in December 2015, she contacted KURVE Wustrow again and promptly secured support for her efforts to contribute to the implementation process. In January 2017, the Centre for Training and Networking in Nonviolent Action conducted, for the first time, the seminar “Youth in Peacebuilding—Living in Diversity and Peace”. It aimed at making the goals of the Resolution



Photo: Jana Burke

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better known to potential multipliers, thus promoting more youth representation in peacebuilding and the relevant decision-making processes. It was the first-ever seminar on the UN Resolution 2250 in Germany, and Jana was one of the trainers.

In November 2018 in Marburg, she eventually convened the worldwide first international academic conference on the Resolution's implementation. At that time, she was already involved in the "United Network of Young Peacebuilders" whose international members engage their respective governments and the European Union for the goals of Resolution 2250. "Unfortunately, there haven't been many specific efforts as yet, not by the German Government either", Jana, meanwhile an active member of the "European Youth Advocacy Team", states with regret. "However, there are now 'Youth Focal Points' at EU level, and Finland has even submitted a detailed action plan. That's exactly what we want to achieve in all countries."

The Marburg conference under the theme "Young People's Participation in Peacebuilding—an Underestimated Contribution on the Way to Sustainable Peace?" was certainly a mile stone in this context. Workshops, lectures and discussion panels focused on how peace should be defined, how young

people could actively contribute to a peaceful world and what steps should be taken to support them in this endeavour. "We continue with systematic advocacy work for the full inclusion of young people in peace processes", Jana emphasises. "One could describe this as nonviolent resistance against inactivity and indifference."

Vital for her is the aspect of "Everyday Peacebuilding"—the question of how all human beings in their everyday life could feel enough integrated so that diversity is guaranteed and conflict prevented. And in this very context, it should be explicitly acknowledged that young people can make an invaluable contribution to a peaceful future. "All generations have an important part to play in peacebuilding, so it's important to deal with each other at eye level", stresses Jana, who is now studying in Marburg for a Master's Degree in Peace and Conflict Studies. "Fortunately, it's becoming more and more visible these days that young people are advocating for peace, for example in groups like 'Fridays for Future'. I always feel newly motivated in my work when I see how young people become active for peace."