



LWR VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY

CLASS NOTES AND TRANSCRIPT

Class 5:

Humanitarianism in Conflict Zones

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TRANSCRIPT:

Tim: Good evening everyone it's a real pleasure for me to be with you tonight. I hope everyone is enjoying a new year. It's a little bit wet and snowy here in Baltimore but I'm glad our technology is allowing us to talk together. I want to say a special thanks to Zorida for taking the time out of her long day to do this. I had the pleasure of being hosted by Zorida on a recent trip down to Colombia with our new president John Nunes about two months ago and it was a wonderful experience. Meeting some of the displaced persons from the terrible conflict in Colombia that Zorida is working with and I'm really looking forward to what she has to say.

What I want to do over the next few minutes is set the stage a little bit, is to talk about development work in conflict settings and to try and do a few things to kind of lay a foundation. First I want to talk a little bit about why it's important obviously we all know that in conflict situations and emergencies relief and humanitarian assistance is vital - its life saving service. But when we talk about development that's usually a concept in the type of programming that one equates with taking place in non-conflict areas in peace time but there is a role for longer term development in conflict and I want to talk about why that's important.

The second thing I want to do is talk about some of the challenges, development is hard enough in a peacetime situation and everyone knows it's not a linear process and it never really goes as one predicts. When you enter into conflict situations it makes it that much more unpredictable and it raises a set of unique challenges to the work that I think are worth highlighting. The third thing I want to do is kind of take a step back and look at some of the lessons that international organizations have learned over the years about how to do development in conflict. When we think about our collective experiences in places like Rwanda, Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo now Iraq and Afghanistan. There is a lot that has been learned about doing development work in conflict settings that I think is important. Then I want to answer the fundamental question – Is it possible? How do you do successful development work in a conflict situation and what does LWR in particular do and what is our approach to trying to create long term change in the midst of crisis.

So those are the four things I want to try and accomplish – but before I do that I want to spend about two minutes and talk a little bit about what I mean by conflict, because when we talk about conflict there's a whole range. On one end of the spectrum you have awful conditions and situations, like what's going on in Afghanistan or in Bosnia. But conflict has a number of different faces sometimes there are countries that are at war with each other, other times there are civil war conflicts other times there are conflicts that take place at the community level. You've got religious, tribal, ideological, resource driven and economic conflicts. And so the more important lesson is that no two conflicts are alike. The things I'm going to be talking about tonight are as applicable from situations like Bosnia, Iraq or Afghanistan as they are more complicated conflict situations it may not necessarily make the headlines everyday but it is still inflicting violence and pain and suffering on civilian populations.

First things first. Why is development work important in a conflict situation? And I think there are three reasons in my thinking why conflict is important. The first is that development theory over the last 50 years has really changed and it's that everyone has understood and intuitively grasped the concept of development as it equated to charity and as it equated to helping people. But it was really only after WW II and the introduction of the Marshall Plan in Europe when development began to be equated not just as a way to address poverty and injustice but also as a way of dealing with international security and creating peace. The impetus for the Marshall Plan was two fold it was in part to help the humanitarian conditions in Europe rebuild but it was also to provide a more peaceful foundation so that conflict would not break out again. And that's an important turning point because it set up these links between peace and poverty and development that are three very strongly interconnected currents that development people in development agencies in their minds recognized, are closely related to each other.

I think the second reason it's important to think about doing development in a conflict situation is that it really is an expression of our Lutheran faith and our values that show us that even in times of war and I would argue, particularly in times of war, people's dignity and strengths and their own faith can shine through. And it's that faith and that dignity and that strength that's inherent in everyone that can actually even in dire conditions during war, it can provide ways of self empowerment opportunities to help these people manage their lives and continue believing that in the darkness of war that

actually is some positive. And so I really feel that being able to focus on long term development in the midst of a conflict is actually an expression of our faith. And it's our belief in human dignity and the power of that dignity that makes it imperative that we focus on this.

The third reason I think is far more one of the practical. I think Dan is following along with the charts for those of you that are looking at the slide show as I talk, but this is a quote from one of our partners in the Philippines in the Southern island of Mindanao and on one level it's such a simplistic equation that it makes a lot of sense but it's actually quite subtle and if you think about the fact that "you can't have peace without development and can't have development without peace" it makes intuitive sense that in a situation of unpeace you have to start looking at development as a way to break that cycle of violence. Relief is necessary humanitarian short term assistance is vital but unless you begin to tackle long term issues related to development, which are in many cases the source of the conflict in the first place, you're never going to break that cycle. And so development is a critical part of the peace making process itself. I'll talk a little bit more about the project in the Philippines because I think it's a wonderful illustration of some of the work we do and it will be a nice counterbalance to what Zorida talks about in Colombia.

So, what are some of the challenges? Again, we know that development work in times of peace is already difficult enough and it's not linear, it's not predictable and there are often things that occur that we don't anticipate that we don't understand and we can't predict. But what makes it even harder when you enter violence and conflict into the situation. Obviously the first issue you have to deal with is one of security. Wars and actors have changed. It used to be, in the good ol' days, you could say that wars were fought between countries and there were rules of war that both armies and fighting forces naturally and more usually tended to accept and follow. Protection of civilians and protection of humanitarian agency groups like the Red Cross. That made intervening in a conflict situation a little bit more predictable. Today, again because of the different types of conflict, those rules have been tossed out the window. With two consequences, often times it's very hard to know who's fighting whom and what the different sides are. In a place like Darfur, you don't have just two sides you have multiple factions, multiple tribal and ethnic groups all fighting each other. And it makes it very difficult to understand the environment. The second thing that's changed about security in a conflict situation is that the recognition that humanitarian agencies were to be protected that they really were neutral and that they would be allowed to do their job in the midst of conflict – that's ended. It's hardly a week that goes by now where you don't see in the paper reports of aid worker being kidnapped or an aid worker being killed or aid programs being threatened. So the very presence of humanitarian aid workers in the conflict situation is far more tenuous today than it was in the past. And this is what keeps me up at night when I think about the work that people like Zorida are doing that is inherently and potentially very dangerous.

The second big challenge is that when conflict tends to break out basic economic, communications, logistic and banking systems tend to break down. I can give you a concrete example of years ago when I was working in Kosovo and we were doing soup kitchens in the Northern town of Mistravitsa there were no banks that were working

because basically the economy was shut down and we ended up having to drive \$25,000 in cash from the capitol all the way through Kosovo on a weekly basis. That's a recipe for corruption and theft and sure enough, despite the fact that we took as many precautions as we could, by traveling in convoys and altering the days of the week we drove and taking different routes eventually we got held up and robbed. And that's the third challenge that makes it difficult to work in development mode in conflict is that the opportunities for theft and corruption skyrocket. In a lot of the developing world theft and corruption is a constant issue and those odds just simply go way up as the level of desperation, the level of lawlessness and the level of violence continues aid programming and the money makes life much more difficult.

Another challenge about doing this kind of work in a conflict setting is the question: can we really be perceived as neutral, particularly as Americans. American agencies working in conflict zones find it very very difficult to escape the baggage of being associated rightly or wrongly, fairly or unfairly with American foreign policy. And as Americans no matter what our own stance may be we have to overcome a series of perceptions and misperceptions about why we're there. This is a key point for Lutheran World Relief this is a key point about how our faith and our values guide what we do. Trying to demonstrate that we're not part of the conflict, that we're not taking sides, that we're really there for the people on behalf of our Christian faith and love is a difficult message to get across – especially in times of war. So the question of perceived neutrality is a challenge that is difficult.

I think another one is that in conflict aid agencies often find themselves being pressured by competing factions and usually what you find is that different factions are trying to manipulate aid for their own purposes. And I'll give you a recent example in Sri Lanka where our office is located, the government of Sri Lanka has for years and years taken a very suspicious attitude towards international aid agencies working in the conflict zone in Sri Lanka between the Sinhalese and the Tamil Tigers several of them have been expelled and efforts to try and work with Tamil ethnic populations are greeted with a great deal of suspicion by the government. About two months ago the government bombed one of the main municipal water sources in Northern Sri Lanka and that wiped out the water access for hundreds of thousands of civilians in response driven by a humanitarian imperative international aid agencies went in and put in place small localized water systems in order to replace that vacuum. The government perceived that as a partisan intervention on behalf of the rebel movement – as a result three agencies were expelled. So the operating environment becomes very difficult when the two sides are trying to use aid agencies to further their legitimate claims to further their aims.

The final, I think really important point, is that conflict is never really black and white. It is usually at most entirely too complicated for outsiders to really understand. Is it ethnic, is it religious, is it tribal, it is economic, is it ideological, is it historical. It's usually a combination of all of those and it's critically important that when you are trying to work in that kind of complicated environment understanding everything you do has to be perceived in all of those different ways – makes it much more complicated. And I think that that really leads to some of the key lessons that I want to take a few minutes to talk about, and again I think that these are lessons that have been learned the hard way by agencies based on their experiences in places like Rwanda and Bosnia.

The first main lesson I think about doing development work in conflict is that development programs will almost always have unintended consequences. You have to recognize and aid agencies have to recognize that their programs are going to impact people in ways we don't really understand and they're going to be perceived in ways that we don't understand. Pursuing aid and development programs in conflict means you have to do two things – it means you have to recognize the aid programs themselves can actually create and exacerbate tensions. If your running development programs that happen to be in an area where one ethnic group is dominant how will that be perceived by the other. Lots of different things come in and you don't understand always that what you're trying to do from a position of love and faith with good intentions can actually exacerbate those.

The second thing you have to recognize is again that the aid programs are almost always try to be used and misused in order to keep power or to obtain power and recognizing that in a war people are going to be doing economic activities and livelihood activities that are connected to the military aims is an important part of understanding why development work has to be so careful about understanding the context and the dynamic.

I'll give you an example from another organization and I won't really talk about which organization because it doesn't really matter – we've all learned these lessons. But there was a group that was working in a war zone in a country in Africa several years ago and this was a war that was basically split between two ethnic groups and they were working in the Northern part of the country where, because of the war food security was very very bad. Crops weren't being planted, markets were breaking down and as a result civilians didn't have enough food. This aid group came in and said, well we can help. We can start trying to revitalize the agricultural system even while some of the fighting is going on. One of the groups, the dominant group, happened to be comprised largely of farmers the other group, which was the minority ethnic group were the traders – they were traders because of their ethnicity and the fact that the ruling parties did not allow them to have land access or ownership to land. That was the social dynamic that you had. The majority group doing the farming and the minority group doing the trading, they were codependent on each other and there were ethnic tensions that had exploded. But by and large before the war they got along and understood each others roles.

As the aid agency began implementing the program though, two things began to happen. One, they began creating different trading and marketing patterns, which bypassed the minority group. The second thing they began to do is that in their hiring practices because many of the minority group populations had been forced to flee because of the war they ended up hiring very well intentioned really good people, but almost all of whom were from the majority group. When the war ended two things became very clear, three things, I apologize. One, they had increased the ability of local people to grow food, that was good. But what they also unwittingly and unknowingly done was create a situation where the traditional livelihood of the minority group, which was to do the trading to do the marketing had been taken away from them and that was no longer an avenue for which they could earn their living. The third thing they had done unwittingly was that because a majority of their local staff was from the majority group and because most of the seeds and tools had gone to that group they actually ended up creating more tension between

the two ethnic groups than they solved. Those are the unintended consequences. A lot of these lessons have been captured in a growing body of literature that kind of falls under the principle “Do No Harm” – making sure that while your intentions are good things that you can’t actually see beneath the surface may be creating and aiding to those tensions. And those are some of the real key lessons.

So, is it possible? Yes. Is it tricky? Yes. I think the slide you are looking at now is a picture of a man in Indonesia after the tsunami three years ago. Many people don’t remember that Indonesia was in the midst of a very violent civil war in the area where the tsunami hit. Right after the tsunami the government and rebel groups were able to reach a peace accord but what you had were thousands of demobilized soldiers. How do you in the context of a very fragile peace agreement re-integrate demobilized soldiers and rebels AND deal with the reconstruction assignments of the tsunami. I raise this example because I think it’s important in terms of the approach we take. The approach we took was to recognize the tension between demobilized soldiers and rebel groups and the communities to which they were going back to were going to remain high. There were tensions and dividers that were going to keep the potential for conflict very much alive. Instead we said, we don’t want to focus on the dividers, we want to focus on the connectors. In a terrible, but yet positive silver lining kind of way the tsunami itself provided that connector. All of a sudden there was a common need and a common problem and common willingness to collaborate between former combatants and enemies. So we built upon the common connection that everyone needed to reestablish their livelihood and the way we did it is we took advantage of some of the skills the demobilized soldiers had. In this case that man was a farmer and many members of that community had been fisherman who were no longer able to return to fishing because their homes and their land had been wiped out and they needed to learn how to farm. We took advantage of that demobilized soldiers’ skills and helped him train people with whom he had been fighting against only the year before. So we built on the connector both as a way of doing development but also as a way of promoting peace.

The last thing I want to do is return to the Philippines and that quote that I had mentioned in the beginning. We have been working with a group called the Balay Mindanaw Foundation and I think it’s an important example because Mindenow is an area that has been under conflict for about thirty years. Again, for a range of tribal, historical and ideological reasons most of the peace processes have failed. They failed, in my opinion because they’ve tried to find a political solution to the conflict. We looked at that and said, that’s not going to work. They’re only going to find a political solution when both their development needs and their peace needs are being met concurrently. And so the approach we’ve taken is we’re not going to talk about political power, were not going to talk about legislative agendas or budgets or who had the presidency and the vice-presidency. We’re going to talk about meeting community needs and through establishing schools and establishing a new water system through building a better road. We have created a space that enables them to put down their AK-47s and actually begin working together on common needs and that approach is not a political approach but it’s an approach that focuses on development both as promoting peace but also fulfilling their humanitarian needs.

I'm realizing by my watch that I have talked too long and I really don't want to cut Zorida off. So I'm going to stop there but I would be happy to answer any questions and listen to your reactions after Zorida has talked. Thank you very much.

Dan: Thank you so much Tim. We're going to move now to Zorida who will specifically about the Colombian situation in which she works and I should have mentioned earlier that Rebecca Phares, our director for Public Policy and Advocacy is also on the line to serve as an interpreter just in case Zorida needs help with some more of the technical words in which she is operating. Zorida, we'll turn it over to you.

Zorida*: Okay, thank you Dan and hello everyone. It's a pleasure to be with you and to share my experiences on my work here in Colombia with Lutheran World Relief. First I would like to talk about the conflict in Colombia and the humanitarian crisis and the consequences of the conflict and also I would like to present a Lutheran World Relief Program in Colombia and show how we promote rural development and North/South Solidarity.

The Colombian conflict is a very long and complex conflict with many actors and many different interests. The Colombian conflict is more than 40 years old now and to understand a little bit about this conflict I want to give a very introduction about the different actors and how the actions of these actors affect civil society. In Colombia like in any country we have our armed forces and security agencies. There has been a significant increase in the government of Colombia and armed forces and specifically since 2000 with military support from the U.S. government on the Plan Colombia. For many people Plan Colombia is a plan for war, and in some of the regions that we work in the north of Colombia some people say that for one civilian there are two militants. Also we have legal armed actors in Colombia; we have the far left and they are the guerillas and also we have the paramilitaries that represent the far right and combatants.

We have two main guerillas, the FARC emerged in 1964 and 2004 have more than 12,000 combatants. FARC means Revolutionary Armed forces in Colombia and also we have another guerilla, a big group that is the National Liberation Army (ELN) and since 2005 they have been in dialogue with the Colombian Government with Uribe - but still that does not mean that we have peace with this group. The third guerilla is the Self Defense Units of Colombia that emerged at the end of the 90's and started an internal mobilization process in 2005. Between 2005 and 2006 they mobilized more than 31,000 combatants, however mobilization process does not mean the paramilitaries disappear in Colombia. They have been a reminder of paramilitary group and the same time they increase the criminal activities. For example they have an alliance between paramilitaries and drug trafficking and now we have a new generation of paramilitaries. Also the paramilitaries have infiltrated local and regional governments and even the congress of Colombia. In addition the paramilitaries control education and health of many municipalities. The rise of paramilitaries in the open conflict with the guerrillas for control the territory and the appropriation of the resources resulted in a critical humanitarian situation, specifically for Afro-Colombians, indigenous groups, women, children, who are living in the rural areas.

In summary, we can say that civil society is in the middle of the conflict in Colombia. This conflict also affects the civil society, and results in the deterioration of many of our human rights. I just want to present some indicators on the human rights situation in Colombia, to give you an idea of what is going on here in my country. On average, 7 civilians are killed every day in Colombia for political reasons. Between 2002 and 2006, more than 11,000 people were killed or disappeared. Kidnapping is a terrible problem we have in Colombia.

Also, many people are victims of landmines and many are arbitrarily detained. The most critical problem in Colombia is forced displacement, and a large percentage of those displaced are women and children, Afro-Colombians, or indigenous people. Families suffer from a loss of protection from the Colombian government. And the government has the chief responsibility for the protection of human rights. Family unity is broken, and the results of displacement are deep – not only cultural but for food production and income generation. Only with specific attention and a social response can we mitigate this crisis. This is one of the main reasons we have been working in Colombia since late 1999.

Now I want to talk a little bit about the LWR program in Colombia and give some examples of our work. LWR has been working in Colombia since late 1999 to support marginalized people and internally displaced people. We have two main areas, one to promote peace and justice through developing an advocacy strategy in Colombia and the U.S. Also, we have a program to promote sustainable rural development by promoting agricultural production and micro enterprise for internally displaced people and other rural poor. It is very important to talk about advocacy work because it means protection for people in Colombia. We have a model for our advocacy work in Colombia – we work with the communities, Churches, people in the U.S., partners, networks, and different NGOs. The constituents and people in the U.S. are also very important in this model because they do a lot of advocacy work. We also have a strategic goal to advocate for peace and justice in Colombia in Washington D.C. The Sal y Luz communities work on many levels, but one is to advocate in Washington D.C. in favor of peace in Colombia. Also, we promote exchange visits for members of the Sal y Luz communities in the U.S. to come to Colombia. We also bring people from the Colombian Churches or partners to the U.S. to talk about the conflict in Colombia in order to educate those in the U.S. We have an advocacy program to train partners in order to help Colombians gain access to key decision makers at the local and national level. Also we support research on key issues related to human rights violations and alternative development. LWR also supports partners and ecumenical networks to develop an advocacy strategy here in Colombia. These partners advocate for the rights and protection of internally displaced people and they denounce human rights violations.

Also, LWR has a sustainable rural development program in Colombia. We work in the north part of Colombia in the region called Montes de Maria, and also we work in rural areas north of Santander. We work with different partners. For example, we work with some communities supporting them with gravity flow water systems to provide water for them to drink and for irrigation. We also promote different kinds of programs in agricultural production and micro enterprise. We support communities to be empowered and make autonomous decisions, to raise their voice for their human rights. Another

example is a project that helps support income generation through small enterprise for black women in the north of the country. We also support training on farming, including technical assistance on organic farming to produce crops for local consumption and sale. We are supporting 18 different communities close to Bucaramanga, north of Santander. LWR has a special relationship with Churches for Peace. These Churches are in the middle of the conflict and have the means to support those who have suffered most from the conflict. We also are supporting social action projects to help establish small businesses for those who have suffered from the conflict, as well as a children's center. I want to reinforce the idea that in Colombia protection of the communities is key through advocacy work to push many different actors in the U.S. government and Colombian government. Many want peace in Colombia and are well organized and trying to build peace at the local level. The Colombia programs here are designed to protect and support these different initiatives, especially at the local level.

I imagine you have many questions, but I hope this information helps you to understand a little bit about the conflict in Colombia and also to learn a little bit about the work of LWR here in my country. Thank you very much, and if you have questions I am ready to answer if I can.

*Because of the poor telephone connection some of what Zorida said was lost amongst the static.

Questions and Answers:

Q: How many active Sal y Luz communities are there?

A (Rebecca): There are six active Sal y Luz communities they are all in three states, for pretty specific reasons, they're in Minnesota, Iowa and South Dakota. They are in those specific places because we really felt that focusing on areas where there were a lot of Lutherans made a lot of sense and also we thought that we would be able to make more of an impact in congress if we chose to really focus in on a specific geographic area, represented by certain representatives and that certainly has turned out to be the case. Those communities: Sioux Falls, Twin Cities several others as well South Eastern Minnesota – those are our Sal y Luz communities and we're very proud of them.

Q: How many countries is LWR active in throughout the world?

A (Tim): We currently work in 35 countries around the world and we have full time permanent offices in 15 countries. Those countries are spread throughout East Africa, West Africa, South East Asia, South Asia, Central American and Latin America. A lot of the countries that we don't have permanent offices, we do however have active partnerships, and those tend to be places where we provide assistance through the material resources program with the shipment of quilts, health kits and school kits. A lot of the material resources do get used by partners for distribution during conflict or natural disaster crisis situations. So it's about 35 countries, with 15 countries with full time offices.

Q: Is LWR active in Iraq or Afghanistan?

A (Tim): We actually in Afghanistan had a wonderful success story we had been working with two different partners both in Kabul and in Habat and we had provided almost \$2 million dollars worth of material resources and it was not easy feat getting those from the warehouse in Maryland into the middle of Afghanistan. Those resources, again those quilts and school kits are being used to provide assistance to several hundred thousand orphans and vulnerable children in Afghanistan – and we're really pleased we were able to do that.

In Iraq we have provided financial assistance to some of our ecumenical and church based partners working in Iraq. We have not been active there in deploying staff.

Q: Recognizing the potential for difficulties in some areas of conflict, what do you do to minimize or eliminate those difficulties? So that you don't exacerbate the situation already in a conflict situation?

A (Tim): There are several things that we try to do. As you know LWR's approach is that we're not an implementing partner, per say, in that we work through our local partners. So a key decision point in terms of making sure that we don't exacerbate or strain tensions that are already there is to figure out which are the best partners. Are they partners that share our values? Do we think they're partisan? Do we think they are able to work in a way that is respected by the community?

The second thing we try to do is make sure that we're viewing the conflict from multiple angles. I'll give you an example of the work we are doing right now in the Sudan. Sudan and in particular Southern Sudan, I'm not talking about Darfur but in the Southern part of the country there has been a long standing refugee crisis. As the war began to wind down about a year ago, two years ago maybe – refugees slowly began to return home as those refugees began to return home from places like Uganda and Kenya the international community mobilized a great deal of assistance to those refugees. One of the things we very quickly noticed was that as the refugees came home and they were given seeds and tools and mosquito nets, they in many cases had different types of resources and the tensions were bring flared up because they were coming back to the communities where people who had never left were trying to receive them. So issues related to, well whose land is it, came up and one of the things that we realized very quickly was that while we needed to support the refugees, as they were returning home; we also needed to support the local populations that had never left. And again I kind of use the phrase connectors or dividers and so one of the things we did is we got returning refugees and the communities to come together – we don't want to talk about why you are angry at each other – we want to talk about what you have in common. And we found two things that they had in common, one was a desire and need for education for the children. The second was a need for water. And so a lot of work in Southern Sudan is meeting a commonly felt need to both groups, to those refugees that are coming back and those that never left and are resentful of all the attention the returnees are getting. By focusing on education and water they both get involved on something they both want and that beings to create space so that some of the dividers they still have to deal with are less important.

Q: How does LWR train its staff to be mindful of conflict and sides? Do you build in reflection as part of the process for the staff in that situation?

A (Tim): The staff that we try to find are staff that have a deep seeded knowledge and understanding. They speak the language, they're from the culture, they understand the history, they understand the politics, and we try to make sure that people like Zorida or other staff that are now in Kenya where all the tension is going on – they're part of the social fabric. The training we try to provide them is on two levels and again I don't want to convey that this is just training from headquarters out to the country offices, because we learn as much from the country offices as we give to them. But the training we try to provide is on how to design a good program, how to build in monitoring system so that we know what we are doing before we start. Have we thought through what some of those unintended consequences might be, before we begin. What we've found is that 80% of a successful program is based on how well it's designed. If you design it well in the beginning and you really involve the community, so that they themselves end up designing the program – then you end up with a lot less risk. So we have had a lot of training over the last couple of years on how to better think our projects so that we think things through a head of time so we don't jump off a cliff – have a wonderful humanitarian desire but perhaps not recognizing were creating problems when we think were doing good. The monitoring and evaluations systems we put in place are constant and so the staff and the partners are constantly talking to the communities about the support they're getting, making sure its meeting their expectations, making sure that they understand it and with out constant and fairly detailed monitoring evaluation system we don't what impact we're having. And if we really want to understand the impact and make sure it's a positive impact we have to build in detailed monitoring and evaluations systems.