



PeaceTimes

Edition 129: *Ah, Men: Three Peacebuilder Profiles*

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Editor's Note

-by Mary Liepold,
Editor in Chief

Ah, men!

Man, I love women, and the world is full of magnificent ones. We lift their voices—*our* voices—every day, for a world of good reasons. But in June, the month of Father's Day in the US, we use our *PeaceTimes* to lift up some magnificent men, men who are making important contributions to peace and international understanding and advancing the status of women. It's always a treat to discuss possible candidates, choose the ones we intend to highlight, and conduct these interviews.

The three gents you'll meet this week have ties of family and affection to five different regions of the world: North America, South America, Africa, India, and the Middle East. They build up peace and the status of women in three distinct, though overlapping, ways.

- Gary Barker, executive director of Promundo, changes cultures at the family and community level by inviting men into alliance with women. Through partnerships with governments and the UN, Promundo's work has an exciting, and accelerating, global impact.
- Forgiveness is the unifying motif of Ples Felix's work with the San Diego-based Tariq Khamisa Foundation. Our interview recounts his fascinating and dramatic life story. Like Gary's, his work is growing from local and very personal roots to gain global notice.
- Rajen Kilachand, CEO of Dodsal, practices what some call the ministry of money. He describes his longstanding family tradition of giving and the experiences that have shaped his diverse, but focused personal choices. From a village in India to a major US university and beyond, he's making a difference.

It's a joy to be reminded of what wonderful partners we have in our fathers, brothers, husbands, sons, grandsons, nephews, cousins, and gentlemen friends. Let's take it higher, together!

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Gary Barker: The 50% Solution to Gender Violence and Injustice

Gary Barker is founder and executive director of [Promundo](#), an internationally recognized NGO established in 1997. Promundo works nationally in Brazil, Rwanda, and the US, as well as globally. Its base of operations is Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, where it carries out community-based work, research, and advocacy to engage men and boys in gender equality; to prevent gender-based violence and violence against children; to reduce homophobia; and to empower and achieve the rights of women and girls. Promundo also

serves as global co-Chair and Latin American coordinator of the [MenEngage Alliance](#), a worldwide network of NGOs and UN agencies working to engage men and boys in gender equality, and [MenCare](#), a global campaign to promote men's involvement as caregivers.

In just a few words, Gary, who are you?

I am an activist-researcher on engaging men in gender equality and violence prevention.

Activist-researcher: I like that! Tell me more about your work in the world.

We're trying to engage men as allies in achieving gender equality, overcoming gender injustice, and reducing violence both in high-violence regions and in post-conflict settings like Rwanda.

You can say that masculinities are destructive in their essence or you can see masculinities as socially constructed and open to change. We tap into voices of peace and resistance, finding men and women who believe in equitable and diverse versions of what it means to be men and women. Wherever we start, in any part of the world, the first process is mapping the voices in the community, however weakened they may be, who strive to build peace and, particularly in our case, to transform violent and homophobic versions of masculinity. Then we enhance their voices, so we're always building on the strength that already exists in that community and the new ways of living are not imported from outside.

Why Brazil?

I have family ties to Central America and Mexico and I spoke Spanish from a young age. I went into the Peace Corps in Honduras in the late 80s and started working with street children, trying to do family support so kids

don't end up on the street or in institutions where they don't get the kind of care they need. In Honduras, stories were so often about the harmful behavior of men at the household level, whether drinking, migrating for work, or being drawn into the many conflicts, leaving women precariously holding things together. Our first wave of work was pointing a finger, saying something's wrong with that, but we moved quickly to asking how can we change it so men also are empowered.

From there I moved to Rio, and as life happens, stayed 15 years. I had the opportunity to meet some really interesting community workers and activists and I was very taken with the [Paulo Freire](#) approach of consciousness raising and empowerment. Working in the favelas in Rio, I got interested in men's reactions to the drug traffickers and how the traffickers were vying for the hearts and minds of young men. I saw that even young men who didn't participate in gangs were rooting for the home team, for "our gang," but I also saw that the gang culture was the minority and there was a silent majority of young men who wanted to be anything but gang members and who were open to new ways of being men. It was easy to turn on a microphone and get the macho and the homophobia, the "gotta put my girlfriend in her place," but these voices were co-existing with voices for justice. I wondered, how could we design programs and carry out advocacy around these positive voices?

So when I moved to Brazil, I found a very interesting moment. It was the post-dictatorship and a progressive policy environment (particularly following the 2003 inauguration of Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva), with a vibrant civil society emerging, and I wanted to be part of applying that new energy to engaging men.

Tell me what it looks like when things are working at the community level.

I'd refer to micro-communities. The settings where we work in Rio are favelas, some with 120,000 people, some 400,000—big settings. The ability of our initiatives to transform life in those contexts is both vast and limited. We work with a cohort of usually young men and young women who become peer outreach workers or community activists, building an approach for change together. We've developed a Program H for men (H for *homens* in Portuguese and *hombres* in Spanish) and a Program M for women (for *mulheres* in Portuguese and *mujeres* in Spanish) to do consciousness raising and engage other community allies. There's a big focus on gender and violence, how we construct these gender norms, how we construct gender equality and gender inequality and how we can achieve change collectively. There are activities with parents so you engage men as early as possible, prenatally when you can, around equitable childrearing, nonviolent, nonsexist childrearing, always understanding the context people live in—understanding that parents use violence not

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because there's some evil streak in them but because of the pressures in the environment. Here's a mother who wants to bring her nine-year-old son in from outside, where bullets are flying. She's afraid, and sometimes a slap is faster than words. We're going to help that mother find sources of strength and then work collectively with others in the community, so the bullets aren't flying.

It's working at the individual level and also reaching out to create networks of support, both formal and informal—whether it's a day care set up by the city or one in a woman's home; a sports league run by the city or one the dads set up—trying to connect up the services and supports that exist for families and improve life in the community. We're often doing just one or two, given the complexity of it, but ideally we're doing it on many levels simultaneously and also advocating with state, municipal, and federal governments to introduce alternate norms and change the service delivery structure so that policies support the change we seek.

Here's an example: The Ministry of Health has a men's health initiative at the federal government level that has adopted our approach, so now they have a program around engaging fathers. We say, here are radio and video spots you can use. We go to the Secretary of Human Rights and we say, here are the things we have done, from t-shirts to magazines to communications. Take it, put your logo on it, it's yours! At the same time, we continue to work at the community level.

What is your greatest fear or concern? What frustrates you?

Just one? [smiling] Well, there's growing attention within the women's rights field to the need to engage men as gendered, as shaped by gender norms. A big concern for me is that this has to be more than a fad—Rah Rah Rah and let's go on to the next thing, without appreciation for the revolutionary aspect of this work. I want to see real transformation of men and masculinities fully embraced, not just inviting 5, 10, or 20 men who already get it to sit on a panel somewhere or talk to other men who are already convinced.

If there has been a revolution in the lives of women, then there has to be one in the lives of men. We want to make sure that this revolution goes to the roots to patriarchy.

The international development field can be fad-driven, and results-driven in a short-term way. Deep cultural and structural change can get lost in the shuffle. So today, that's the biggest one. Tomorrow I might say something different.

[Continue Reading Gary's Interview Here](#)



Youth in Session in Brazil, Promundo



Ples Felix: Retired Warrior, Teacher of Forgiveness

Ples Felix partners with Azim Khamisa in the work of the [Tariq Khamisa Foundation](#) (TKF), which they co-founded in 1995 to stop youth violence through education, mentorship, and community service. The two men came together around the murder of Azim's 20-year-old son Tariq by Ples's 14-year-old grandson Tony and their mutual recognition that "there was a victim on

both ends of that gun." Ples has an undergraduate degree in Political Science and Economics and a Master's in Administration in Urban Affairs and Policy Analysis. He has worked in the community development field for more than 25 years. His speaking voice communicates warmth and sweetness as well as conviction.

Tell me about your own early life, Ples.

I am a child of God and the firstborn son of my parents, Ples Felix Sr. and Nicola Felix. Growing up in Louisiana and then South LA, as a child with African American parents who were moving out of the segregated South, even though I shared the same history with many other families, I felt very different. I was a blond kid, a "yellow boy" who stood out in the mostly African American neighborhood. Kids respond to difference with inclusion or exclusion, and I was excluded. I had to figure out ways to stand up for who I am as a person and the right of all people to live without threat, and that included a lot of fighting.

After high school I joined the army and saw my ability and desire to excel as something that could propel me, that opened doors. After much evaluation and assessment I qualified for Special Forces. I always praise the Spirit that got me ahead, prepared me for Vietnam, where I did two 12-month tours in 1969 and 1970. That experience crystallized for me the delicate balance of life and death and exposed me to an opportunity. At age 19 I learned to meditate at the knee of a Buddhist monk, who saw a red aura around me that needed to be dialed down. I had no idea at the time that our outer expression of destruction was eroding us inside. I was raised Baptist and I was always a praying person, but this new spiritual practice allowed my breathing to access the voice of creation within me, to use gifts that I'm sure were passed on from my Mom. They saved me and saved

many of my comrades. I still meditate morning and night. I did a lot of prayer and meditation after Tony, my one and only loving grandson, murdered Azim's son Tariq, and I was provided the energy and clarity I needed.

Tell me about your grandson, please. First, how did he come to live with you?

I have one child, a daughter, the heart and life of me, the center point of my loving, giving nature that I didn't recognize until she was born. She became pregnant at 14 while she was living in Maryland with her Mom and I was in New York City, getting a Master's at the New School for Social Research. She didn't want to be a mother; there was lots of tension. Her mother, who gave her birth at 16, said "You've got to do it." There was nothing I could do to influence them; I could only support my daughter. I was there when Tony was born so she would know she was not alone in this awesome responsibility, and I spent lots of time with them both in his early years. As he grew up and my daughter and her mom transitioned back to California, I moved from NYC to manage a detox facility in Phoenix so I was closer to them. There was lots of love and support, but this girl was still young and she left Tony with his grandmother more and more so she could catch up with her social life.

They came to live with me in Arizona when Tony was 4 and she was 19, and he was in a lovely, diverse Native American daycare center. He was happy in that setting. Then one Friday his Mom said she was going to LA and she didn't come back. He's worried, distracted, and I'm telling him, "She loves you and she will come back, and she wants to see you happy and growing." It worked, sort of, for three months, but he was feeling abandoned, so we set out to go find her.

With some help from my mother, we did, and they were reunited. His Mom moved in with another family until he was 8. I found out much later that there wasn't enough adult supervision and he was molested by the oldest child in that household. At 8 he saw the aftermath of a gang murder, saw his favorite teenage cousin put into a body bag. He had a lot of anger behind that; he was vengeance-filled, full of a can't-do attitude. I was living in San Diego then and his mom insisted he come to live with me. This time I made it clear that it would have to be permanent and for Tony's benefit. Tony wasn't happy about it. Over the past 4 to 8 years he had tried to connect with his biological dad and been rebuffed. I had a hard time with the can't-do attitude, so I imposed a strict regimen on this kid who needed more than structure and missed his mom and wanted to do the right thing. I was aware that I wasn't responding to his emotional needs, so I put him with a therapist twice a month, an African American man. I told his teachers I'd be staying in close communication and I expected close communication from them. Talking with the therapist was helping, so Tony

From the beginning I'd been praying for an opportunity to meet the other family and commit to them in any way I could. When I heard Mr. Khamisa say in an interview that there was a victim on both ends of that gun, I knew he was a God spirited person.

bonded with a few excellent teachers and got more confident, discovered he *could* do and began to excel. He started middle school with friends he'd had since 4th grade and good prospects. Lots of other kids had single parents.

This lasted until 8th grade, when he wanted to hang with some "cooler" guys. He's coming up on 14, feeling tension, wants to hang at the park. I say only if it's adult-supervised activity, and then

straight home. I caught him in a lie and a week later found out he's not been going to school, and he's defiant. This was a Friday night. On Saturday I got him up early, told him to use his anger as fuel to get through the homework he'd missed, and left to run errands. When I came back he was gone and he had left a note: "Daddy, I have run away, Love Tony." A shotgun was missing too. I called the police and reported him as a runaway, gave them information on him and the gun. That same night I heard a news report about a pizza delivery man being murdered. Foreboding washed over me like cold water. I went to pray, but I couldn't shake it.

I called my daughter on Sunday and she found out where he was through a girlfriend in LA, called the number, and heard Tony's voice in the background. On Monday I called the police and told them where he was, and told them to be careful. They went to the door, he came out with them, and I soon found out he was the #1 suspect in the Saturday night murder. We got him an attorney and I sat with the attorney and my daughter and watched videotape of his interrogation. At first he denied it. Then we heard him cry out, "I can't believe I killed somebody. I shot the pizza man!"

At first he really didn't seem to understand what he had done. After we talked he wrote out a statement pleading guilty and seeking the forgiveness of those he had harmed. He tried to protect his friends, who were all older, and they turned and testified against him. We had a brand new DA, just elected on a tough-on-gangs platform, and a brand new law allowing juveniles to be tried as adults. After a 6-month process, he was found fit to be tried as an adult. He got 25 years to life.

From the beginning I'd been praying for an opportunity to meet the other family and commit to them in any way I could. When I heard Mr. Khamisa say in an

interview that there was a victim on both ends of that gun, I knew he was a God-spirited person. We began to work together soon afterwards.

Where is Tony today?

Tony is in Corcoran State Prison where he has his first job, moving pallets of food to a van. He's 12, 13 units away from his associate's degree and wants to be a child psychologist. For much of his time he was in a maximum security, 23-hour lock-in, but he got his GED under those circumstances and scored 96%. He's allowed to take correspondence courses that I pay for. I'm encouraging him to go for a PhD. He is not eligible for parole until 2027. Azim has worked with past governors and is working with the current one, appealing to commute his sentence.

You've had quite an impressive professional career, Ples. What is the accomplishment that gives you the most satisfaction?

Without any doubt it is working with children in our schools to teach them the practice of forgiveness and see how that changes them and their families, how the adults have been affected. It's the most gratifying thing I have ever done or could ever do. [Continue Reading Ples's Interview Here](#)



The Tarik Khamisa Foundation (TKF) works to stop youth violence through education, mentorship, and community service.

Rajen Kilachand: A Family Tradition of Philanthropy

Rajen Kilachand, Chairman and President of the UAE-based [Dodsal Group](#), is a leading global business leader and philanthropist. His diverse enterprises range from mining in Tanzania to Pizza Hut franchises in India, and his philanthropy from Boston University (to which he made a \$35-million gift in 2011 and 2012) to hospitals and schools, community aid and humanitarian missions, and

women's empowerment organizations in India, the UAE, the US, Europe and Africa.

Founded in 1948 by the Nandlal Kilachand family in partnership with a British trading company, the Dodsal Group now has more than 25,000 employees in 22 countries and has received numerous awards for safety and exemplary project execution. Mr. Kilachand received the Global Business Achievement Award at the Masala Awards in 2011. Peace X Peace CEO Kim Weichel and Board President Gail Montplaisir interviewed him in Dubai, UAE, on June 1, 2013.

Why is philanthropy important to you, Mr. Kilachand?

Philanthropy is an indulgence to my soul. Every single time I see the difference I've made to the lives of the people I've helped, the communities I've nurtured and built, and the achievements of the initiatives I have encouraged, I feel joy unlike any that my corporate achievements have been able to manifest.

Besides, it is a genetic seed. My family has always been known for philanthropy, and it was something we talked about around the dining table. Meals were always a great social time—3 hours over dinner talking and sharing experiences; no TV and no other diversions, just talking and sharing. There would be 12, 14, 16 children at the table, and our mother and grandmother always talked to us about the importance of philanthropy.

My great grandfather's son gave his entire fortune to his village, and the British gave him the highest award for philanthropy they could possibly give to a non-British citizen. He was only 32 years old when he was given this award.

What many forget is that India did not exist as a nation at that time; rather, the clans extended from Kandahar to Burma. In 1860 to 1870, my clan was on the border of Rajistan and Gujarat, where it is very barren. And, while they subsequently moved to a more dense region—to Bombay—their ties to their village remained strong.

In 1900, my grandfather's son gave the village resources that were very valuable—water supply, hospitals, and an animal hospital, long before people thought about animal hospitals. Ten years before he died, he moved back to the village from Bombay and used his skills and fortune to help elevate people's lives.

In 1950, the village honored my grand-uncle by building a mini Arc de Triomphe with a clock in it that is named after my family. Between the 1970s and 90s, my late father and his brothers built a temple there, and also a school for training teachers. India does not have enough teachers for its population of 1.2 billion. The college is still there, as are the temple and the arch. In 2012, I received a message from the mayor that they wanted to honor me on behalf of the family legacy, and I went there for a fete in March of that year. I have now established a maintenance fund for the village assets.

In the past 30 years, our businesses have taken a big jump in wealth and success. I took the family enterprises to a new, global level, and I moved the headquarters to Dubai in 2003.



Bagvada Dharwaja Arch in Gujarat

All countries should have a woman ruler if they want to have peace. The message that we men are not ready to accept is that men should not be running the world.

As a global philanthropist, what are your goals and strategies?

I am the only major non-US sponsor of the New Orleans Jazz Festival. I host annual kite festivals in Gujarat to celebrate my family's passion and my own expertise in this unique sport. Although it's diverse, my philanthropy is focused primarily on health and education. One cannot prosper spiritually, physically, and financially

without these two areas. These are not just for the rich, and must be available for all people for a society to progress.

I went to Boston University from 1971 to 1974, and the US fostered in me (although it was unbeknownst to me at the time) an admiration for great educational institutions and hospitals that were gifted by individuals. I found that very admirable. This left a deep impression, and made me realize anew how important it is to give to humanity.

My philanthropic outlook and my appreciation for life were also formed by three life changing experiences. I used to drive fast and wild, but now I no longer do. After a very serious car accident that left me incapacitated for six months, I rethought my life and it changed me. During that long recuperation I realized that I was benefiting from state-of-the-art medical facilities, but only because I could afford them. If I had been poor, I would have been left permanently disabled to some extent.

The second such experience was when I went to Tibet—hiking 12 to 15,000 feet up near Lahsa to a holy site, which is a mountain and a lake. The third was when I had an angioplasty, and again benefited from superb medical care.

During my convalescence I realized that I had a deep yearning for education. I inadvertently started operating a university out of my home. I hired professors to come to my home to teach me about the classical music and traditions of Europe and India, and about various religious philosophies. After 15 days of lessons, we had 60 village women there in the house during the day, also soaking up all of this knowledge. It spawned a

real love of the history of civilizations, and awoke in me an even-stronger desire to bring education and health to the people.

By the way, when I pledged \$35 million to Boston University (the largest gift in the university's history) I requested that it be used to provide more general education. I feel that too many people are too specialized. And I desire to continue my focus on health issues. One of the health organizations I support is Pathfinder International and its Indian CEO, Purnima Mane. Their work is in women's health. I also support the Cherie Blair Foundation for Women and many other women's organizations.

What advice would you give to women around the world?

I'd say: Don't feel shy. We are all leaders. In my family we were raised with a great respect for women, and for our elders. When my grandmother was ill, we would all still go to her room regularly to receive her blessings and to keep her informed of our activities: where we were going, how long we would be gone, and when we would return home.

I believe in empowerment but also that it must be according to the culture of the particular country and region. In Asian countries like India, Pakistan, Burma, where women have often been treated like cattle, many women leaders have emerged and have led their countries.

In ancient civilizations such as India and Egypt, in the Arab countries and the African countries, women have had very equal and powerful roles. In my opinion, it is only in the last 200 years when women were made to feel second. I believe industrialization had a negative effect on women's treatment. Men began to think that they alone could lead.

The world is 50% women. The distinctions are meaningless; they were created by men. But this will change again as the wheel goes around. Tell the women, a man is a man, a woman is a woman; yes, there are differences, but we are all equal. I read recently that in 40% of all US households, women are the greater income earners. [That Pew study](#) was just released the other day.

What advice would you give to men?

I would tell the males to stop being so high and mighty. In the history of the world, especially the last 2,000 years, the longest period of peace was when a woman, Queen Victoria, was in charge. All countries should have a woman ruler if they want to have peace. The message that we men are not ready to accept is that men should not be running the world.

Resources

- Learn more about Promundo and its programs at this site: <http://www.promundo.org.br/en/>.
- IMAGES, the [International Men & Gender Equality Survey](#), is a baseline and indicator of progress in the new masculinities campaign.
- [MenEngage](#) is the global alliance of NGOs working to transform gender relations.
- [MenCare](#) is the global fatherhood initiative, with ready resources for your community.
- Of course, [UN Women](#) has ample resources as well.
- Patrick Stewart answers a fan's question in this [beautiful, heartbreaking video](#). He talks about his father's PTSD, what some are now describing as moral injury in war.
- Connect with Ples Felix, Azim Khamisa, and [the Tariq Khamisa Foundation online](#).
- [Restorative Circles](#), like Promundo, is based in Brazil. It's a simple and powerful approach to community justice.
- Minnie Driver talks about the power of forgiveness in this [brief video](#).
- And finally, our Fathers Day gift to you: a priceless [story told by Noa Baum](#).
- (Here's [Noa on our site](#).)

Announcements

- Last call to register for two Peace Salons in the DC area: Africa Women Lead, on Thursday 6-20, with Madame Regina Amadi-Njoku; and Caryle Murphy, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *A Kingdom's Future: Saudi Arabia Through the Eyes of Its Twentysomethings*, on T. 6-25. Contact Yasmina@peacepeace.org.
- Film-makers under age 25 have until 6-30 to enter the new [UN youth video competition](#) with short films on migration, diversity and social inclusion.
- The [2013 Global Peace Index](#) is out!
- What comes after the MDGs? It's shaping up, & it's looking good. This [latest UN report](#) puts women at the center.
- Looking for a job, a scholarship, a peace-related MOOC, or just the inspiration to keep going? Join the [Peace and Conflict Development Network](#).
- The American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee will host it's National Convention this weekend. [Among its speakers](#) are Yasmina Mrabet and Nawal Rajeh of Peace X Peace.
- **Celebrate men and women who build peace by contributing to [Peace X Peace today!](#)** Send us your own first-person story, or [volunteer to interview](#) a fascinating women you know, and do [comment](#) on our blogs! It's easy and quick.