Issue Clusters

The researchers identify the cases in this database by which of these clusters of issues the campaigners are struggling about:

- Democracy
- Economic justice
- Environment
- Human rights (including free practice of religion, women's rights)
- National/ethnic identity (including anti-colonial struggles)
- Peace

In some cases, more than one of these issues may be involved, for example an environmental dispute that is also seen by indigenous people as a matter of ethnic identity and economic justice. Such a case is marked so it will be reached by a search for any of those three issue clusters.

Another example is a group that is campaigning for a free radio station (the human right of free speech) but also sees itself as contesting for a less authoritarian form of governance (the democracy cluster). We particularly use "democracy" when the struggle is about governance/decision-making.

Although many points of view exist on what "peace" means, for this database we reserve the peace cluster for those situations where the campaigners aren't as interested in an increase of, say, economic justice or the institutionalization of human rights as they are in *reducing the level of violence/injurious force*.

In situations like the nonviolent campaign against apartheid in South Africa (and the Egyptians in Jan-Feb 2011), the campaigners expect MORE injurious force to happen (to them) as a result of their campaign. Despite the reduction of "peace" (defined as behavior that forcefully injures), they want to press on to achieve their goals. So the anti-apartheid activists and the Egyptians behaved in ways that put pressure on their opponents, and their opponents responded by unleashing violence.

(Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., made a philosophical connection between the injurious force we talk about and the "structural violence" that philosophers and peace scholar Johan Galtung talk about, by saying that campaigners nonviolently confronting police don't make the violence happen but instead raise the underlying injustice to the surface so that, when police or Ku Klux Klan beat and kill campaigners, they make visible the violence that was already there in the form of racism and economic inequality.)

In this database, "peace" campaigns and interventions accept the primary intention of the campaigners to reduce the level of injurious force and its threat. Peace campaigners try to force nuclear disarmament, to stop manufacturers from making land mines and cluster bombs, to force the U.S. to stop bombing Vietnam and to stop Russia from bombing Chechnya, to raise the costs to a dictatorship of killing labor organizers. While those very same campaigners may have other values in addition -- solidarity with labor, anti-imperialism, racial equality, for example – in a peace campaign or third party nonviolent intervention they focus on reducing the level of violence and the threat of it. Their degree of success, therefore, needs to be seen in those terms.

-George Lakey 16/08/2011

A project of Swarthmore College, including Peace and Conflict Studies, the Peace Collection, and the Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility.