

INTERNATIONAL TRAINING COURSE ON MINDFULNESS AND SELF-CARE IN HUMANITARIAN AND FRAGILE CONTEXTS

18 to 22 May 2020 in Barcelona, Spain.

INTRODUCTION OF THE COURSE

While it seems that mental health issues among professionals working in humanitarian and fragile contexts are very much present, these issues seem to be yet invisible. As stated by Antares 2013 report, 30% of aid workers have experienced post-traumatic stress disorder. BREATHE International field experience working on humanitarian staff self-care in Colombia, South Sudan and Bangladesh for Mercy Corps and IOM and some other reports focusing on humanitarian and aid workers (national and international) in South Sudan and Uganda show that those professionals experience substantial levels of chronic stress, anxiety, depression and burnout.¹

In front of this alarming reality, the stigma remains high and the measures to prevent and deal with mental illnesses stay very low. From larger NGOs, intergovernmental organizations to grassroots entities face the challenge to have limited access to be provided with the relevant instruments to handle such situations. In those same studies, factors contributing to mental health issues include the traumatic situations faced by the humanitarian and aid workers and volunteers as well as the lack of support and structures in place.²

Mindfulness is a mental training and personal development practice that links concentration exercises with self-observation in order to deepen our personal and social awareness. It was popularized in the West by Jon Kabat-Zinn since 1979, and has generated increased worldwide interest since then.

A repeated mindful awareness practice, like the intentional observation of the natural breath or the deliberate examination of our thoughts, emotions, mental states and the place these has in the body helps, with a trauma sensitive guidance, to develop a more balanced and focused presence. This promotes self-awareness and self-regulation, two fundamental qualities that constitute the base for a great number of social-emotional competencies. Ultimately, mindfulness practice promotes a state of open and non-judgmental awareness in which processes of acceptance and healing can occur within people engaging with the practice.

Recent neuroscience research ([Tang, Holzel, & Posner \(2015\)](#)) on mindfulness states “that, in adults, mindfulness improves health and well-being by reducing stress, anxiety, and depression; inducing more positive states of mind; enhancing immune system function; increasing motivation to make lifestyle changes; and fostering social connection and enriched interpersonal relations, among other benefits” ([Meiklejohn et al 2012](#)).

¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6209176/>
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233887648 Stress Mental Health and Burnout in National Humanitarian Aid Workers in Gulu North ern Uganda](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233887648_Stress_Mental_Health_and_Burnout_in_National_Humanitarian_Aid_Workers_in_Gulu_North_ern_Uganda)

² <https://www.france24.com/en/20180513-mental-health-struggles-humanitarian-sector-ngos-ptsd-msf-unchr-oxfam>

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The course seeks to implement an international training programme on mindfulness for professionals working in humanitarian and fragile contexts.

The main objective of the training is to strengthen competencies of personal development practice and self-awareness, life skills, mental health and human connection through the acquisition of the practice of mindfulness and the ability to incorporate and replicate the practice within the current work of the participants.

In particular, the program is targeting mid-career and senior staff at multilateral agencies, governments, NGOs, foundations, universities, in particular (but not only) directly working with populations affected by violent conflicts and extremism, war or genocides, gender-based violence, environmental disasters, trauma, refugees and internally displaced persons, among others. Individuals working or having an interest in mindfulness sensitive trauma are also welcome.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES:

SELF-AWARENESS: Opening up to new perspectives about who we are.

Encouraging consciousness about our own being: about our lives, needs, desires, emotions, behaviours, values, visions, habits, strengths and struggles. Becoming aware of how we relate to ourselves through our body and the observation of the mind.

LIFE SKILLS: Strengthening the resources we need to direct our lives.

Developing practical life skills such as our intentional presence and focus, emotional awareness, or resilience and self-regulation in the face of difficulties. Using these skills as a driver for conscious decision-making and self-directed personal growth.

MENTAL HEALTH: Feeling comfortable with ourselves.

Strengthening physical and mental wellbeing through healthier stress management, self-care practices and the healing of trauma; fostering a sense of inner calm and harmony; developing greater self-compassion and connection to life; and rediscovering joy, purpose and inner freedom.

HUMAN CONNECTION: Feeling at home in our shared humanity.

Nurturing empathy, compassion and care for ourselves and others, developing active listening skills to connect more deeply as well as building and maintaining healthy human relationships in all domains of our lives. Learning to see our commonalities before our differences.

METHODOLOGY AND FORMAT

The proposed training is based on non-formal learning methodologies focusing on experiential, holistic and diversity in learning.

The methodology will focus on the development and strengthening of competences that will provide mindfulness-based self-care strategies tailored to humanitarian workers, as well as some minimum comprehensive understanding around how to apply Trauma-Sensitive mindfulness into the work carried out in the field.

It will have a combination of:

- **Knowledge:**
 - 1) Window of Tolerance
 - 2) Physiology of stress and reactivity
 - 3) Vicarious trauma³ from Field Work and its impact on the nervous system
 - 4) How to apply minimum trauma sensitive mindfulness practices with MHPSS, Protection or Site Management teams.

³ Vicarious trauma is understood as the “transformation in the self of a trauma worker or helper that results from empathic engagement with traumatized persons and their reports of traumatic experiences.” McCann, I. Lisa; Pearlman, Laurie Anne (1 January 1990). "Vicarious traumatization: A framework for understanding the psychological effects of working with victims". *Journal of Traumatic Stress*. 3 (1): 131–149.

- **Skills:**
 - 1) Understand sources of stress
 - 2) Identify bodily resources to regulate the impact of stress
 - 3) Awareness on thoughts, emotions and sensations to improve emotional regulation
 - 4) Building up and reaching out to healthy boundaries
 - 5) Understand and name participants' own self-care strategies according to their reality
- **Values:**
 - 1) Compassion
 - 2) Mindfulness
 - 3) Respect for diversity
 - 4) Gender sensitivity
 - 5) Cultural sensitivity

There will be daily practice of mindfulness.

PRELIMINARY AGENDA:

Day 1: Introduction in working in fragile context and autopilot: Mindfulness for self-care

Day 2: Mindfulness in emergency situations

Day 3: Trauma Sensitive Mindfulness I

Day 4: Trauma Sensitive Mindfulness II

Day 5: Integration in the light of attention, intention and compassion.

SENIOR TRAINER:

Paula Ramírez is a Colombian national. While studying Anthropology—and because of an illness—she became curious about the ways in which human beings can build peace from within, and how resilience and healing can be inspired and guided through the body. She began her humanitarian work in India, Nepal, Thailand and Myanmar. Paula has been Co-Directing RESPIRA in Colombia (now Breathe International) since 2013 where through mindfulness, somatic body work and anthropology she has worked with teachers in conflict affected areas, survivors of torture, Gender Based Violence and landmines survivors and humanitarian workers self-care in Colombia, South Sudan and with Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. She has an MA in Conflict Transformation from Javeriana University, is an MBSR trainer from the University of San Diego California, Trauma Sensitive Yoga facilitator through the Trauma Center in Boston, has co-directed trainings of Trauma Sensitive Mindfulness with David Treleaven and is a Somatic Experiencing practitioner.

SUPPORT TRAINERS:

Pilar Lindo. Pilar started her personal journey through dance and yoga. Later, she discovered that her best way to connect with people and learn about herself was through education and, therefore, she has been an educator for 20 years, with the deep purpose of helping people to find their true selves and to improve the world we live in. She discovered meditation 12 years ago, which together with her husband and two children as her wisest teachers, have supported her personal growth. For 3 years, she directed the NGO *Children of the Andes Humanitarian (COTAH)* leading education projects with indigenous communities in northern Ecuador, and currently lives in Madrid, Spain, where she leads, together with Romeral, the direction of RESPIRA in Spain. In addition to her title in Education, she obtained a Master's Degree in Neuropsychology and Education, specialized in Mindfulness in Health Contexts with the Complutense University in Madrid and is currently enrolled in the Master in Mindfulness in Health and Research Contexts in the same university.

Romeral Ortiz Quintilla. Romeral Ortiz Quintilla holds a Master degree in International Development from the Free University of Brussels, and is a committed peacebuilder practitioner being inspired by the role that youth plays in preventing violence and promoting peace. She started her journey as a youth and peace advocate towards the UN Security Council Resolution 2250 Youth, Peace and Security. She has been leading programmes related to youth empowerment in social inclusion, peace education, conflict transformation, from youth led organizations to international institutions (United Nations, Council of Europe and the European Commission) in Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, North Africa and Asia. She recently worked as project manager in Sri Lanka with the UN in supporting youth participation in the peacebuilding process. She is a senior trainer and has delivered and facilitated trainings and consultations on youth and

peace and on localizing UNSCR 2250 to youth-led organizations and youth institutions in those geographical areas based on non-formal learning methodologies. She is the main author of UNOY Youth4Peace Training Toolkit. While working on this field, she has acquired and strengthened her practice in mindfulness as she also strongly felt the need to reconnect with her own inner peace and the practice of mindfulness has been an incredible gift to explore with youth the power of empathy, nonviolent communication and emotional wellbeing. She is now leading with Pilar the chapter of RESPIRA in Spain.

LOGISTICS

Date and Location: 18-22 May 2020, at Sant Felip Neri House in Barcelona, Spain. It will start at 9:00 on Monday and end around 15:30 on Friday.

Participants: The program is targeted at mid-career and senior staff at multilateral agencies, governments, NGOs, foundations, universities, in particular (but not only) working with populations affected by violent conflicts and extremism, war or genocides, gender-based violence, environmental disasters, trauma, refugees and internally displaced persons, among others. Individuals working or having an interest in mindfulness sensitive trauma are also welcome.

Language: This course will be taught in English.

Training course Fee: The course fee is 1,500€. This fee includes course materials, refreshments, and lunch. It does not include the cost of traveling to/from Barcelona, visa, accommodation, insurance, and other meals, such as dinner.

Notice: If needed and justified, we can provide scholarships or waivers for the course fees. We also provide participants with letters of support in obtaining sponsorship, logistical assistance and letters in support of participants' visa applications upon request. Payment arrangement information will be included in acceptance letters.

HOW TO APPLY

The application form can be downloaded [here](#) as a Word file to be completed and sent to info@respiraenespana.org and info@bcnpeacecenter.org.

Kindly send along your Curriculum Vitae and a copy of your passport.

If you have any questions about the application process, programme, or logistics, please contact info@respiraenespana.org and info@bcnpeacecenter.org.

Deadline for receiving applications: **01 April 2020**

Please note that this course requires a minimum number of participants.

Upon confirmation of attendance, we will issue a pro-forma invoice to be paid by bank transfer before April 10, provide logistical information about different accommodation options, including within the venue where the course will take place and dispatch letters in support of visa applications for Spain. The course fee will be refunded if the visa is not granted.

ABOUT US

BREATHE INTERNATIONAL believes in a more conscious and compassionate humanity. We thus passionately promote trauma and culture-sensitive mindfulness practice for sustainable peacebuilding, seeking to establish mindfulness as an accessible, practical and effective personal development strategy for social-emotional learning, peace education, community building and trauma healing. BREATHE runs four targeted programs for schools, communities, social organizations and the open public. Visit our website <https://breathe.international> for more information.

BARCELONA INTERNATIONAL PEACE CENTER, The BIPC is the outcome of an initiative to promote the culture of peace through dialogue, awareness-raising and training in crisis management and conflict resolution. Created in 2009, the BIPC is the only center of its kind in Spain. Its work is inspired by the philosophy of centers around the world specializing in crisis management and peace operations. The BIPC's main activity is an international specialized training program designed to meet the extensive learning needs of civilian personnel and to equip them with the skills they need to engage in field operations around the world. The center offers a range of training courses aimed at professionals working in peacebuilding, complex crisis management, and humanitarian affairs. Visit our website <https://bcnpeacecenter.org/> for more information.