

**Practical Steps
In training with Prabha
Sankaranarayan CEO of Mediators
Beyond Borders International**



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About the CMA

The goal of the CMA is to help make mediation efforts throughout Africa more effective. We do so by offering academic and practical courses in mediation, researching new and current best practices, and offering support to organisations and governments involved in mediation processes.

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Summary

The Centre for Mediation in Africa (CMA) in the Department of Political Sciences at the University of Pretoria was privileged to host the CEO of Mediators Beyond Borders International (MBBI), Prabha Sankaranarayan. The CMA team gained invaluable insights during a day long training where Prabha shared her expert knowledge and practical experience with the CMA team members.

The training session was held in the Department of Political Sciences seminar room in the University of Pretoria's Hatfield campus. All CMA members participated in the day-long workshop on Monday the 27th of March, which included comment and narratives from Scott Martin, also a MBBI staff member. The workshop was structured to accommodate participation from and engagement with CMA members and covered three broad areas of learning. These included a conversation around women in mediation and women's global networks, followed by discussions on traditional leaders - the North American experience and the final session revolved around digital peacebuilding. On Tuesday the 28th of March, Prabha delivered a presentation on 'The transformative role of mediative practices in rising global authoritarianism' which was well attended by students, ambassadors, and colleagues.

A key aspect of MBBI lies in their focus on process and not advocacy and the ability to keep learning, adapting and contributing. According to Prabha, "nothing is static, we grow through our dialogues and conversations, what do we want to be and do?" It is questions like these that take us to the understanding that people at the heart of the conflict should be at the heart of its transformation. Prabha spoke of the strength, humility and support that women bring to any peace process whilst making us aware of the fact that women are de-escalating on a daily basis as they guide, shape and influence so many potentially explosive situations. Women are impacted by peace agreements and should be in spaces where the negotiations happen, but from listening to the women themselves, MBBI found that different communities and cultures consider their roles differently. For instance, in Burundi, the women felt it was more important to have impact than presence and chose to convey their demands and needs to male spokespersons rather than to fight for a space at the table. This approach emphasised the idea that "the wisdom is in the room, our role is just as facilitators," and brought home a fundamental dynamic to mediation – humility, when engaging. A powerful moment for many of us in the room was Scott Martin's description of peacebuilding among indigenous people in North America and the very different approach to life and law that defined those societies. It was a stark reminder of how structure and compliance was about 'giving life' and not as a means of 'control and deterrence.' This is best captured in the comment from one of his interviewees who said, "This is the law- be careful not to hurt the heart of others and listen with a compassionate heart."

The Way Forward

During the participation and sharing session, the CMA's team members shared their research foci and expressed their gratitude for the training and insights given. These conversations and exchange of ideas allowed team members to reflect deeply on different approaches to their research and to expand their perspectives to mediation, mediative practice, and peace building.