

**AVP International Gathering**  
**South Africa**  
**27 August – 1 September 2006**

**To the worldwide AVP Family,**

At the start of spring, 104 people from 23 countries have gathered at Hartbeespoort Dam between Johannesburg and Pretoria, South Africa: a rainbow gathering in the Rainbow Nation. We have come together at The Good Shepherd Retreat Centre, a place of welcoming hospitality, peace and spirituality. In this beautiful place we have found new friends and old friends, hugs and laughter, singing and dancing, and a dazzling array of talks, workshops and shared wisdom. We have been moved by personal testimonies and fired by the many visionaries in our midst.

The Gathering was designed, organised and facilitated by an inspiring team of South African staff and volunteers based at Phaphama Initiatives. An essential part of the experience has been the South African context in which we have shared the food, the culture, the languages, the history and current concerns of our host nation. For five days we have all been Africans. We have lived the concept of ubuntu: umuntu ngumuntu gabantu, the interconnectedness that makes us human.

Three themes, or 'strands', have woven the fabric of the Gathering. The work of the first strand has been to establish the AVP International Development and Resource Committee to 'gather and provide resources to the AVP community to increase its full potential for peace and nonviolence worldwide'.

In the second strand we have shared experiences and skills gained through the unique AVP learning process. Our 'Grandfather', Steve Angell, has been with us to encourage and inspire us as we look at ways to improve, refine, expand and develop AVP in ways appropriate to our differing cultures and societies. Despite our obvious differences, we have been amazed by the common underlying spirit and processes of AVP.

The third strand has explored strategies for local organizations to achieve stability and sustainable growth. Those of us from outside Africa have been impressed by the energy and growth of AVP in African countries – countries with appalling experiences, past and present, of war, genocide, apartheid, poverty, disease and crime. These countries have used AVP imaginatively in locally relevant ways. In Rwanda 1,400 newly elected local Gacaca judges have received AVP training. In Sudan, where AVP started in December 2005, 13 workshops have already helped to bridge the gulfs between Christians and Muslims, men

and women and among the many tribal groups. The Franciscan Damietta Initiative in Africa, a grassroots movement promoting non-violence, reconciliation and care for the environment, uses AVP for its initial training programme. In South Africa, amongst AVP's many partners and projects, is the HIPP (Helping Increase Peace and Positivity) Club, where young people take their own version of AVP into schools and offer skillful facilitation and powerful role-models. The list is endless.

The Gathering has, above all, affirmed our vision of AVP and its transforming power. In small and large groups we have learned from each other that we can be infinitely creative and flexible with this precious gift. We also recognise the many organizational challenges that face us.

The messages from U.S. prisoners have reminded us of all our brothers and sisters incarcerated around the world. Many other AVPers were not able to be with us in person, but we feel your spirit has been with us.

With blessings and a warm South African Hug!