

EXERCISE:

Opening Ceremony

FORMAT:

GROUP
EXERCISE

TIME: 45 MIN

REQUIRED MATERIALS: CANDLE(S) (OPTIONAL), ADDITIONAL MATERIALS FOR CEREMONY (OPTIONAL, SEE BELOW).

SUMMARY:

As appropriate, facilitators mark the opening of the workshop with an opening ceremony.

KEY EXPLANATION POINTS:

- In many past workshops, we have opened with a simple ceremony. This is intended to:
- mark the beginning of our work together;
- ground us in this space, to help leave the stresses and strains of our outside world behind, clear our minds and bring us together. To create a safe space; and
- to connect us – to the other human rights defenders who have been a part of past workshops, to each other, and to the elements that sustain us.

FACILITATION NOTES:

- Simple openings could include:
- asking participants to take a moment of silence to give thanks for the safe arrival of all, or to honour loved ones;
- lighting a candle in the centre of the workshop space to signal a beginning; and
- an alternate, playful opening could include tossing coloured balls (soft 'stress' balls are ideal) to all participants and asking them to hold on to them for later exercises.

Examples of more elaborate openings include:

- **Nepal 2008:** lighting candles and laying red poppies in a bowl of water. One participant, who was pregnant with twins at the time, lit the first candle.
- **Colombia 2008:** distribution to each participant of individually designed cards with a picture and description of the Mayan symbol corresponding to their birthday.
- **Kenya 2008:** after lighting a central candle, participants greeted and welcomed each other by pouring water and laying a rose in individual bowls. The exercise was completed with a 'hara breathing' exercise (see page 106).