

EXERCISE:

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FORMAT:

GROUP
EXERCISE

Opening Ceremony

(Example from the Kenya Integrated Security Workshop)

TIME: 30 MIN

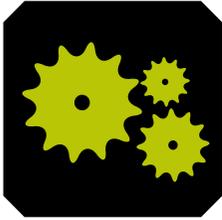
REQUIRED MATERIALS: ONE LARGE CANDLE, ONE LARGE WOODEN PLATTER, GREEN MATERIAL, ONE ROSE (OR OTHER FLOWER) PER PARTICIPANT, ONE SMALL BOWL PER PARTICIPANT, TWO PITCHERS OF WATER, MATCHES OR A LIGHTER

SUMMARY:

This is an example of an opening ceremony for the Kenya Integrated Security Workshop. It is a welcoming for each of the participants that helps to step away from the stress of daily life and focus on creating a safe space together, as a group.

KEY EXPLANATION POINTS:

- Prior to participants arrival, facilitators should place a large candle on top of a round wooden platter in the centre of the workshop space. Put this on top of a large piece of green material. Lay out a scarf from a past workshop, and postcards from the workshops (these are important for the introductions exercise that follows). Lay a red rose on the seat of each participant's chair and put a small bowl on the floor in front of them (set to the side of the chair). Two pitchers of water are on the facilitators' table.
- When all of the participants are seated, the facilitator explains that this is an opening ceremony to mark the beginning of the workshop.
- The facilitator introduces the candle lighting by explaining that first we begin with light – bringing us clarity, energy, warmth – literally light to counter the darkness and the difficulties that you face in your work.
- One participant, or the facilitator, then lights the candle in the middle of the circle and initiates a moment of silence.
- The facilitator introduces the water element by saying: 'next, we pour water for each other – as a symbol of refreshment and renewal'.
- The facilitator then pours water for the second facilitator from a pitcher into the empty bowl, then the second facilitator pours water for the the first. Next, ask each participant to pour for the person next to them (facilitators can also pour for the participants if necessary).
- The facilitator then introduces the earth element by saying: 'next, we lay down flowers – as a celebration of beauty. A celebration of ourselves – and each other. To celebrate the fact that we made it here safely to this place, that we are here together and that we have three days for ourselves, alone. The earth supports us, nourishes our physical bodies and it gently grounds us in place – here, with each other, in the moment.'
- Ask each participant to lay down their rose in the bowl of water, and then to place them in the inner circle closest to the candle. As they lay it down, keep in their minds, that this is their space, it is for no one else. For their well-being and their safety. A place where they can impart worries that are unspoken – remove weights from their shoulders, from their hearts and bodies – and share their concerns safely.



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- The facilitator introduces the air element by saying: ‘finally, we celebrate air – and breathe! Many of you have travelled a long way to get here. You have left behind loved ones. All of you are leaving behind a lot of work – and that may weigh heavily on your heart – because a part of you may want to be fully here, and a part of you is still with the work – the reports you need to write, people you need to see, etc. This is a time to release that tension.’
- Finally facilitator leads a simple hara breathing exercise to release tension and to set focus (see ‘hara breathing’ exercise in the section on integrated wellness exercises for details).

FACILITATION NOTES:

- This is a very peaceful and grounding opening. It may appeal more in certain cultures than others – for example, while this worked well in Kenya, it may not have been as well-received in some of the former Soviet Union contexts.