

Peace & Non-Violence in Action Around the World

Last Fall Light Connection featured a local grassroots group that is advocating with members of Congress to pass the ground-breaking “Department of Peace and Non-Violence” (“DOPN”) Bill (H.R 3760 and S.1756). The Bill is currently in committee in both Houses of Congress and, when passed, will establish a Secretary of Peace and Non-Violence as part of the federal Cabinet, with jurisdiction to offer non-violent solutions to conflicts occurring both in international locations as well as here at home in our own neighborhoods.

The Department will focus on peaceful conflict resolution, the prevention of violence by addressing its root causes, and the promotion of justice to expand human rights. The national campaign is being organized by “The Peace Alliance” who state on their Web site (www.thepeacealliance.org), “By understanding and addressing the root causes of violence, we can predict and ameliorate myriad hostilities, improve national security, ease the burden on state and local govern-

ments created by the violence in our streets, help protect human rights, and prevent and de-escalate armed international conflict.”

Two San Diego business people, Christine Elliot and John McNeil, are Southern California State Coordinators for the growing national grassroots campaign advocating on behalf of the DOPN Bill. In the Fall of 2004, they began with a small group of 70 committed San Diego citizens and their ranks have swelled to 3300 people now on their distribution list throughout



Cindy Henson receives her Master's from the University for Peace.

Southern California (www.afdop.org). Nationwide, there are active DOPN groups in all 50 states and recently San Diego was host to all DOPN State Coordinators at the Town and Country Hotel January 20–22, 2006.

Costa Rica Connection

This past Holiday season, John and Christine decided to vacation in Costa Rica because of the country's links with peace. They visited the United Nations University for Peace, a possible model for the “Peace Academy” provided for in the DOPN Bill. (See additional details below). A friend, Rita Marie Johnson, and her husband Juan Enrique Toro, are ministers for a Unity Church in the Costa Rican capital of San José. Rita Marie also runs the non-profit “Peace Army”, a training organization that educates K-12 teachers how to teach non-violent communications techniques to Costa Rican students.

Christine and John observe, “Costa Rica is one of the only countries in the world with no standing army, and a former President and current Presidential candidate, Oscar Arrias, was instrumental in facilitating the peace negotiations among many Central American countries that still lasts today.”



John and Christine with bust of Mahatma Gandhi at the U.N. University of Peace.

The U.N. University For Peace

The Department of Peace and Nonviolence Bill provides for the establishment of a Peace Academy, patterned after our existing military academies. While novel for the United States, this is not a new concept. Before their recent Costa Rica vacation, Christine and John learned from their friend, Cindy Henson that a model already exists in San José, Costa Rica.

Why would a successful business woman resign her comfortable corporate position and move to Costa Rica to attend the United Nations University for Peace to obtain a Masters Degree in International Peace and Conflict Studies? Cindy Henson wanted to raise her social and spiritual consciousness and then live the life that arose from that consciousness. Cindy notes, “In Spanish it is called ‘*conscienciacion*’ which means raising awareness *and* taking action.”

The University for Peace (www.upeace.org) was chartered by the United Nations and is funded by grants from committed nations and private donors. Their mission is “to provide humanity with an international institution of higher education for peace with the aim of promoting among all human beings a spirit of understanding, tolerance and peaceful coexistence, to stimulate cooperation among peoples, and to help lessen obstacles and threats to world peace...in keeping with the... Charter of the United Nations.”

Cindy's year-long (2004–2005) education at the University for Peace included learning about the relationship between peace and conflict and the links between conflict and poverty, education, environment and economics. She tells us it is much more complex than the sound bites heard on CNN. However, it was the interaction with her fellow students that was the most enriching for her. There were people from 39 other nations, bringing their cultures, religions, rituals, experiences and languages to the lush tropical setting in peaceful Costa Rica.

Cindy says, “I came away from my experience with a deep respect for humanity and our undeniable connection with one another. My new ventures are to live life more fully, more focused on serving and contributing my gifts and talents. Living

peacefully is my goal.” Cindy leads Henson Consulting Group (www.hensonconsultinggroup.com) providing strategic planning, leadership development and business development consulting. Based on her experience in Costa Rica, she has added conflict resolution services and training.

Other Countries & Department of Peace

On International Human Rights Day, December 10, 2005, participants at the Alliance for a New Humanity conference in Puerto Rico, representing hundreds of organizations from around the world, voted in favor of a resolution endorsing a U.S. Department of Peace. This international endorsement from the conference is further evidence of the expanding global movement for ministries and departments of peace in countries around the world. Participants in Puerto Rico who expressed their desires to take this movement into their own countries included citizens from Palestine, Israel, Sri Lanka, Australia, Canada, Japan, Denmark, Germany, and many others.

The International People’s Initiative for Departments of Peace was launched at the People’s Summit for Departments of Peace in London in October 2005, where organizers came together from a dozen countries on four continents to explore how to support one another in the effort to institutionalize a culture of peace in the operation of government in their countries. A second Summit will be held in Vancouver, Canada in June this year. This effort, involving grassroots movements to establish Departments and Ministries of peace in countries around the world, has a new Web site and newsletter posted to keep you updated: www.peoplesinitiativefordepartmentsofpeace.org

Undeniably, there is a growing desire in people the world over to shift the paradigm of violence we have chosen and to create a new world order, wherein conflict will be prevented, reduced or resolved through communication, understanding and compassion. It’s an idea whose time is *now*.

Learn more by visiting www.thepeacealliance.org and www.afdop.org. If you are in San Diego, stop by their booth at EarthFair in Balboa Park on Sunday April 23.

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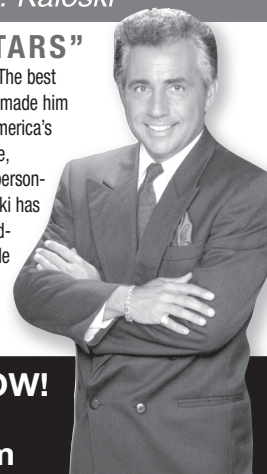
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