

Young Leaders Peacebuilding Retreat

October 25-28, 2006
Dharma Drum Mountain Retreat Center
Pine Bush, New York



Sculpture by Gustave Vigeland

Photo by David Finn

A Program of the Global Peace Initiative of Women

“It is harder to sustain peace than to fight wars. It is easy to destroy but hard to build.” --- Sudan Youth Delegate

Cultivating Compassionate Leadership

On October 25-28, 2006, a group of young people from around the world will gather at the Dharma Drum Retreat center in Pine Bush, New York for three days of intensive discussions and reflection on what young people can do to enhance the environment for peace in the most sensitive regions of the world. Approximately 75 young people between the ages of 20 and 30 will engage in dialogue with each other and respected elders from various cultures to explore the most effective ways to reduce conflict and resolve differences nonviolently. This peacebuilding retreat is a pre-summit meeting of the United Nations Global Youth Leadership Summit, which will take place at UN headquarters in New York October 29-31, 2006. Delegates selected by the United Nations from regions of conflict will join youth from North America with express commitments to peacebuilding.

This peacebuilding retreat is the culmination of a series of regional summits organized by the United Nations and the Global Peace Initiative of Women in the effort to mobilize young people around the themes of the Millennium Development Goals. During the last regional summit in Africa, many young people from conflict areas came together and formed the Young Leaders Peace Council and committed to working together on peacebuilding issues. During this event it became clear to the young people that all the development issues, whether it be poverty reduction, environmental sustainability, health, education or gender, were premised on the condition of peace and stability. Development cannot take place without peace; development can be dramatically set back when conflict erupts. Development and peace go hand-in-hand. For both to be realized, greater compassion is needed in all walks of life.

As the concluding event of a three-year program of regional youth summits, the United Nations Global Youth Leadership Summit will focus on the theme of poverty eradication. This peacebuilding retreat supplements that program by exploring the different aspects of conflict transformation and reconciliation and healing so that true progress can be made and sustained.

In GPIW's peace dialogues between Israelis and Palestinians, among Iraqis, and now with Sudanese, we have found that the best investment for peacebuilding is with the generation just coming into adulthood, now entering their professional lives and forming their worldview. This is the generation being tapped by extremists, and it is this group that must be cultivated as the essential building block for peace in the years ahead. It is this generation that can move from an exclusive to inclusive mindset, transcending national, ethnic and religious barriers, and begin to identify with the whole of the human community rather than only their own traditional community. It is this generation, being the first global generation, that can incorporate a deeper understanding of interdependence, knowing that what takes place in one part of the world will affect all others. They are at the formative stages in cultivating the qualities needed for leadership, and if well mentored can provide new directions in the political, economic, social and religious realms – all very much needed if we are to relieve growing world tensions and alleviate the high levels of violence in the world today.

A number of themes will be covered during the three days of discussion, including the conditions leading to conflict, early warning signs, the interconnection between factors that determine peace or conflict, dialogue and listening skills for conflict mediation, the means for reconciliation and healing, and how to foster a transformative compassionate leadership so that this new generation coming of age will reject violence as a means of settling differences, care deeply about the suffering of others and whose compassion will move them to action.

The United Nations series of youth leadership summits has demonstrated the strong desire of young people for an inter-generational dialogue and mentoring experience. The UN Global Youth Leadership Summit will bring world political leaders to engage with young people on the theme of eradicating poverty. The Peacebuilding Retreat will bring esteemed cultural and spiritual leaders to work with young people on building transformative leadership – leadership that can transform others through their compassion -- in whatever field of work they enter. It is designed to help them explore root causes of conflict and extremism, cultivate compassion for the other and find ways to build unity among diverse groups, interests and traditions. It will explore the dynamic around respecting the other – what this means and how it is enacted. The goal is to stimulate an inner change so that the young people will go back to their communities inspired to build a global network of youth who can together work toward greater realization of human unity and cooperation.

Participating countries:

Afghanistan, Cambodia, Israel, Lebanon, Palestine, Sudan, Iran, Iraq, Sri Lanka, Northern Uganda, Sierra Leone and Somalia, among others.

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