



# BREMEN PEACE AWARD 2009

Courageously Crossing Thresholds



**die schwelle**  
Beiträge zur Friedensarbeit  
The Threshold Foundation

Bremen Peace Award of the *Threshold Foundation*  
for exemplary Commitments to Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation

# BREMEN PEACE AWARD 2009

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## **Preface**

At a time when encouraging signs in international politics are rather few and current political actors bring only little promising hope for the future – apart from some manifestos that touch upon problems relevant **today**, it is encouraging to learn about palpable efforts of people committed towards promoting sustained international understanding. Free from governmental influences, a growing number of individuals and organizations are committed to preventing ignorance and helping people in distress without relying on governmental support.

Individuals and groups of people from different continents promote an attitude of peace and understanding as well as encourage peaceful co-existence. They also advocate for the protection of universal human dignity in order to prevent it from turning into mere lip service. *The Threshold Foundation* makes efforts to contribute to peace work through its Peace Award as well as publishing this brochure, thus encouraging others to get involved – whenever and wherever possible. In current difficult times, the foundation also promotes sincere commitment to the integrity of creation worldwide.

Bremen, July 2009  
Hans Koschnick



- 5 **Preface: Hans Koschnick**
- 8 **Introduction: Reinhard Jung** For the Fourth Time: The Courage to Cross Thresholds and to Break Vicious Circles

### Award Winners

- 12 **Susan Jennifer Gilbey (Australia), Unknown Peace Worker**  
Bearer of Hope for many Refugees
- 14 **„Animus“ und „PULSE Foundation“ (Bulgaria), Exemplary Organization**  
Courageous Actions on Violence against Women
- 16 **Rubin Phillip (South Africa), Public Engagement**  
Tireless Peace Worker

### Examples of Peace Work: Germany

- 20 **Fit for Life – Peer Leader International** Young People Discover Hidden Talents
- 22 **Kulturbrücke – Intercultural and Intergenerational Education Centre** A Place of Understanding
- 24 **Gunpowder Factory Liebenau** Dedicated Citizens Keep Commemoration Alive
- 26 **Medical Aid Organization for Refugees, Göttingen**  
Action Group *Health Care for All* Illness does not Ask for an ID Card
- 28 **NETZ Bangladesh** Local Support – Lobby Work in Europe
- 30 **OWEN – Mobile Academy for Gender Democracy and Peace Development**  
Education to Promote Peace
- 32 **Karl-Wilhelm ter Horst** Pastor from Lower Saxony Protects Deserters
- 34 **Citizen Action Group FREle HEIDe (Free Heathland)**  
March Evolved from Protest into Celebration
- 36 **Women Daring Peace** Persistent Commitment Towards a More Humane Society

### Europe

- 40 **Coventry Peace House (Great Britain)** Food, Shelter and a Little Dignity
- 42 **Alexander Shekhotkin (Ukraine)** Overcoming Barriers and Promoting Individual Potential
- 44 **Maite Pagazaurtundúa (Spain)** Standing Up Against Climate of Fear in the Basque Country
- 46 **Andreas Maislinger (Austria)** Memorial Service to Uphold Memory

### Asia and Middle East

- 50 **Women’s Committee within United NGO Mission – Manipur (India)**  
Working Together for Peace and Women’s Rights
- 52 **Archbishop Thomas Menampambil (India)** Courageous Peace Mediator
- 54 **Fauzia Aziz Minallah (Pakistan)** Teaching Kids Peace Through Art
- 56 **Heny Yudea (Indonesia)** Fighting Biopirates
- 58 **WADI Association for Crisis Assistance and Development Co-operation (Iraq-Germany)**  
Freedom Begins in the Minds
- 60 **Free Gaza (Gaza)** Setting Sail for Freedom’s Shore
- 62 **EcoPeace/Friends of the Earth Middle East (Israel, Palestine, Jordan)**  
Environmental Activism Fostering Peace
- 64 **Rabbis for Human Rights (Israel)** Commitment to Justice is Rooted in Faith

### Central America, Africa, Worldwide

- 68 **Carmen Cumez (Guatemala)** Encouraging Woman with Traumatic Life Story
- 70 **Sister Godelive Miburo (Burundi)** Bridge-BUILDER of Burundi
- 72 **Alyn Ware/Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament PNND, (New Zealand)**  
An International Network Advocating Nuclear Disarmament
- 74 **About the *Threshold Foundation***

## Previous winners of the Bremen Peace Award

### 2003

#### Unknown Peace Worker

*Sister Weronika Sakowska, Rwanda*

#### Exemplary Organization

*Parents Circle – Families Forum, Palestine*

#### Public Engagement

*Hans Graf von Sponeck, Germany*

### 2005

#### Unknown Peace Workers

*Roswitha Jarmann, England*

*Barbara Gladysch, Germany*

#### Exemplary Organization

*Interfaith Mediation Centre, Nigeria*

#### Public Engagement

*Prof. Wassilij Nesterenko, Belarus*

### 2007

#### Unknown Peace Worker

*Bassam Aramin, Palestine*

#### Exemplary Organization

*Conciudadanía, Columbia*

#### Public Engagement

*Wolfgang Kessler, Germany*

## For the Fourth Time: The Courage to Cross Thresholds and to Break Vicious Circles

*The Threshold Foundation* biannually awards the international *Bremen Peace Award* since 2003. Awards are given in three categories worth € 5000 each.

The third award ceremony took place on November 16th 2007. This year, the *Bremen Peace Award* was awarded for the fourth time on 30th October 2009 and the ceremony was held in the upper chamber of Bremen Town Hall. This brochure portrays award winners as well as 24 selected nominees, individuals and organizations, committed to peace, justice and the integrity of creation.

### Idea and Intention: Good News for Us All

Awarding a prize means drawing public attention to issues that would otherwise receive very little consideration. It is useful to generate recognition and encourage award winners to carry on. One could also say: "We want to bring into the limelight what is good and important, so that the news is not just dominated by what is bad and destructive."

It is said that attracting attention is everything nowadays. And yet we are not governed primarily by the *zeitgeist* or spirit of the age. It is much more the primal insight that even Jesus of Nazareth expressed: "Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick, and it giveth light unto all that are in the house" (Matthew 5:15).

Light that overcomes darkness of bad news and reality: this is what the *Threshold Peace Award* is all about too: encouragement for everyone involved and for everyone who hears about it.

## Invitation for Nominations for the Award and its Categories: *The Unknown Peace Worker in First Place!*

As in its previous award ceremonies, we stuck to three nomination categories:

- The *Threshold Peace Award* distinguishes itself from other comparable awards in that it honours first and foremost the **Unknown Peace Worker**, i.e. individuals who commit themselves to their cause without a great deal of attention or recognition.
- The criterion *unknown* was, however, not enough for us. It was to be supplemented by outstanding and **Exemplary Organizations** – regardless of whether known or unknown.
- Lastly, a third category has been added – **Public Engagement** – to honour people in rather prominent positions who move against the mainstream staying true to their convictions and thus serving as a role model to all.

In December 2008, we invited nominations for the award in the areas of work to which the foundation is committed: justice, peace and the integrity of creation. Invitations were extended regionally, nationally and internationally – the latter primarily via the Internet. Nomination deadline was in February and the final decision was taken in April 2009.

### Great response in 2009

By the end of February 2009, there had been almost 70 nominations compared to 40 in 2007. Once again the range of nominated organizations/initiatives and individuals was very encouraging. Only a few nominations were rejected immediately because they didn't meet the minimum requirements with regard to content or form.

What remained was an impressive collection of mostly unknown individuals or organizations committed to the concept of shalom in the broad sense. Our *Peace Award* is truly international: For the first time, nominations were received from all continents.



**The Fourth Brochure or:  
Many Initiatives and People are Worthy of Receiving an Award!**

The second distinguishing aspect of *The Threshold Bremen Peace Award* is that the awarding of this prize is not the sole purpose. In fact, what is as important is the publishing of a brochure briefly describing projects and individuals we basically consider to be worthy of receiving an award. We have therefore tried to give this fourth brochure a particularly attractive design.

However, in order to keep the brochure in a handy format, we have limited the number of brief descriptions, including the award winners, to 30. This means that we have had to leave out around 40 of the nominees. Most of them also carry out very impressive work, but unfortunately we had to draw the line somewhere. This brochure does not include single nominated persons, unless they represent an outstanding organization.

The result can be seen here in a German and an English edition. We want to publicly honour the work of the people and projects presented here, give all the readers the same encouragement that we felt and enable them to establish contact.



For that reason we ask everyone that receives this brochure to pass it on to friends and acquaintances or to order extra copies. It could be a small Christmas present with the motto: A little light that overcomes darkness of "bad news".

**The Award Winners**

As usual, the choice of the three award winners was very difficult for the foundation's board and advisory council. Once again there were many possible candidates in every field. However, the choice has never been so difficult.

Our three award winners are honoured on behalf of all other individuals and groups presented in this brochure. They especially impressed us, which does not mean that the work of other nominees is not as good.

They are all distinguished by exemplary dedication, and encourage us to cross thresholds and break vicious circles. They are good news for us all.

Reinhard Jung  
Chairman of the board of the *Threshold Foundation*

**Susan Jennifer Gilbey, Australia**



The Australian Susan Jennifer Gilbey is not a lawyer by profession. Nevertheless, she fought and won many court cases for asylum seekers in Australia, ensuring them permanent stay permits. She is actively working in various areas of society in order to promote peaceful living.

Susan Jennifer Gilbey  
gilbysue@hotmail.com

**Bearer of Hope for many Refugees**

Australia, a continent full of natural beauty, is a dream destination for millions of tourists. However, those who do not come to Australia as tourists and have to stay longer, face a lot of difficulties. The Australian asylum policies are too rigid, as Susan Jennifer Gilbey very well knows: supporting refugees, who had to flee their country due to war or political persecution, has become an essential part of her life.

Susan Gilbey's work in advocating for the rights and safety of asylum seekers began, when her personal situation seemed hopeless to others who may have given up in despair: a serious accident caused her to suffer disability and from severe chronic pain. Instead of retreating into privacy, Susan Gilbey joined the *Australian Peace Committee*. At that time, the Australian Government was harshly criticised for the inhumane treatment of asylum seekers. This led to the rise of a protest movement, supported by lawyers, who fought cases of imprisoned asylum seekers free of charge.

As a result, many refugees were granted a limited stay permit. The government however refused to cover the legal expenses, which made it almost impossible for the refugees to receive a permanent stay permit. Some lawyers still did not want to give up and offered legal trainings to volunteers enabling them to work as paralegals for the rights and in the interests of the refugees. Susan Jennifer Gilbey was the first volunteer to receive such training. She then successfully fought for a residence permit for a number of refugees and thus paved the way for a better future for them.

Susan Jennifer Gilbey is still in touch with many of her „clients“, including a refugee family from Sudan, to which she once took to her home. She is actively involved in various national and international initiatives and networks. She is also one of the presenters of a local radio programme called *A Peace of the Action* dealing with global issues such as peace, human rights and social justice. Furthermore, she is committed to fighting racial discrimination against Aborigines. However diverse her fields of social action may be, Susan Jennifer Gilbey's dedicated work is fuelled by the conviction that social commitment is the only viable way to make the world a little more humane.

*Proposed by Don Jarrett and Irene Gale*

„Animus“ und „PULSE Foundation“, Bulgaria



Many Bulgarian women became victims of forced prostitution in the West – however, after they return home, they continue to find themselves in a nightmare. They are stigmatized, humiliated and beaten. The relief organizations Animus and PULSE Foundation aim at helping the victims and do lobby-work for the needs and rights of these women.

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PULSE Foundation  
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**Courageous Actions on Violence against Women**

Many women from Eastern Europe are being allured into the trap of human trafficking by false promises and prospects for a better life in the West. Instead of getting dignified work, they become victims of brutal pimps and „customers“, mistreating them as bondswomen. Some of these women are freed while others manage to flee. After returning back to Bulgaria, however, the trauma often continues: Many of them are discriminated again because of their past and become victims of male domestic violence.

The Bulgarian organizations *Animus* and *PULSE Foundation* support returning women in the process of reintegration. Animus is based in Sofia, capital of Bulgaria, while PULSE Foundation is based in Pernik, an industrial, but impoverished town 60 kilometres southwest of Sofia.

Both organizations are actively working on the issue of violence against women. They provide shelter, necessary medical care and psychosocial support to women who have been forced into prostitution as well as to other women who have become victims of male domestic violence. Even their children have access to these programmes. Additionally, *Animus* has set up a national emergency 24-hour hotline. The *PULSE Foundation* also works with drug addicts in Pernik, which are high in number and seem to reflect people’s desperation and lack of hope in this city.



The members of *Animus* and *PULSE Foundation* are courageously and unpretentiously fighting for the rights of these female victims. They are persistently working for a change in Bulgarian society which is still strongly dominated by patriarchal relations and perceptions and in which the political system only slowly begins to recognize the importance of such civil society actions.

*Proposed by Leo Kreuz*

Rubin Phillip, South Africa



Rubin Phillip was an outspoken opponent of apartheid – today, he is an Anglican bishop from KwaZulu-Natal and is still engaged in the struggle for justice. His voice is heard in this rather young democracy and he makes best use of it: for example, by advocating education on HIV/AIDS and supporting refugees. He also successfully campaigned against and prevented the shipment and delivery of weapons to Zimbabwe.

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**Tireless Peace Worker**

Commitment to peace and justice has always been an essential part of Rubin Phillip's life. The Anglican bishop from the South African coastal province KwaZulu-Natal joined the *Black Consciousness Movement* at a young age – a movement which opposed the racist ideology of apartheid with a new black self-esteem. Due to his leading role in the resistance movement against racial segregation, he was put under house arrest in 1973 for three years.

Till today, Rubin Phillip does not mince his words. After the end of apartheid he did not retreat into privacy. Instead, he pinpoints sociopolitical and economical issues of this young democracy right away. Heading a group of church-leaders from KwaZulu-Natal, he mediated between political opponents. In this manner, he played an active role in curbing violence in his country. His activities combating the dramatic spread of HIV/AIDS have also been outstanding: he not only asked priests of his diocese to undergo an HIV-test, but also set a good example by getting himself tested first.

Along with other church-leaders, the 61-year old bishop is one of the founders of *Solidarity Peace Trust* advocating human rights, freedom and democracy in Southern Africa. He supports those who are not yet benefitting from democracy in South Africa: displaced persons, victims of persecution, detainees. Phillip visits them in prisons and hospitals and offers legal advice in court cases. In April 2008, when a wave of xenophobic violence unleashed in South Africa, Phillip campaigned for the protection of refugees. Due to his strong efforts, these refugees received shelter and support from South African churches.

The refugees mainly came from the neighbouring country Zimbabwe, where the population has been suffering for years under the oppression of dictator Robert Mugabe. Even here Rubin Phillip has been actively involved in peace work. In April 2008, a Chinese ship containing weapons for Zimbabwe was not permitted to arrive in Durban and had to return immediately: Together with another peace activist, Phillip successfully managed to get a court order and prevent this delivery of weapons. Furthermore, through the *Solidarity Peace Trust*, Phillip and his colleagues try to support and mobilize people in remote areas of Zimbabwe in order to pressurize their political leaders.

*Proposed by Hildegard Lenz, Rev. Phumzile Zondi-Mabizela, Douglas Dziva and Lukas Ngoetjana*

**Examples of Peace Work**



**Germany**

## Fit for Life – Peer-Leader International



Many youngsters may not be the best students in school. Through *Fit for Life – Peer-Leader International* however, these young people between 13 and 19 years get the chance to reveal their hidden talents, which cannot be measured by grades.

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## Young People Discover Hidden Talents

Three teams of young people from South Africa, Brazil and Ostrhauderfehn (Eastern Friesland, Germany), aged between 13 and 19 years, have been working together on a common goal for the past three years: preparing themselves to become peer leaders for international and local projects on cultural, social and ecological issues. For this purpose, they overcame geographical and language barriers and participated in international meetings. In October 2006, the so-called *peer leaders* met in the township of Mabopane, South Africa, in October 2007 in Ostrhauderfehn, Germany, and in 2008 in Mauá, Brazil.

*Fit for Life – Peer-Leader International* is a project supported by the *Partnership Mirantao Association*. For the *Fit for Life-project*, the association is working together with the secondary school (Haupt- und Realschule) of Ostrhauderfehn since 2006. In close cooperation with similar teams in South Africa and Brazil, students of Ostrhauderfehn receive training in group-leadership during project days, school lessons or international seminars. The students are motivated to assume responsibility and take things in their own hand – since only those who take initiative can bring about a change in his/her own life as well as environment.



The student's activities are manifold: for example, in close cooperation with *ProFamilia*, they formed an HIV/AIDS-team to conduct awareness raising in various schools. The environmental-team campaigns for solar energy, fair-trade products and energy saving methods. A theater group has written a musical on the discovery of the "8th Continent" and a sports-team encourages people to integrate fitness training into their everyday life. Furthermore, the *peer-leaders* work together with many associations and help to run a volunteer service bureau. During the G8-Summit 2007 in Heiligendamm, Germany, they were involved in many activities and spoke to participating German politicians. Many new projects are still being planned.

The project *Fit for Life – Peer-Leader International* is showing good results. It has been recognized by UNESCO as an official project of the UN Decade "Education for Sustainable Development" and is one of the winners of the Contest titled "365 Landmarks in the Land of Ideas", which is part of the initiative "Germany – Country of Ideas".

*Proposed by Harald Kleem*

### Kulturbrücke – Intercultural and Intergenerational Education Centre



Living together, learning from and caring for each other – these are the guiding ideas of *Kulturbrücke* (Culture Bridge), an education and resource centre in Lindau (Bodensee), which provides a place for intercultural and intergenerational exchange of ideas. The main aim of *Kulturbrücke*, bridging the gap between cultures and generations, is achieved mainly through language courses, drama groups as well as support classes for students.

Kulturbrücke – Intercultural and Intergenerational Education Centre

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### A Place of Understanding

Integration is not a hollow word but a lived experience at *Kulturbrücke Centre*, Lindau. For the last three years, various courses and events in the fields of education, information, culture as well as creativity have been organized here in order to bring people of different origins and cultures together. These promote mutual understanding, tolerance and joint discussions, which serve to eliminate stereotypes. Furthermore, *Kulturbrücke* serves as a contact and exchange platform for other organizations working in this field.

*Kulturbrücke's* program is diverse: participants can choose between various courses in which they can draw, cook, dance, play theater or music. Furthermore, the organization provides information on issues of child-raising and health, consultancy for migrants, training in job-application and organizes cabaret, panel discussions, holiday camps for children, etcetera.

Almost 30 volunteers are actively engaged in the work of *Kulturbrücke* – long-established inhabitants of Lindau as well as people with migration background.

They give courses, organize events, offer support classes to pupils and inform people about *Kulturbrücke's* activities. There are two professional staff members, which support volunteers and carry out administrative as well as organizational tasks.

*Kulturbrücke* is supported by the association "exilio – Help for Migrants, Refugees and Victims of Torture" founded in 1995. Aim of "exilio" is to help those people, who were oppressed and persecuted on political, ethnical or religious reasons. The association offers psychosocial, medical and legal support and helps them to adapt to their new environment. Around 700 children, youth and adults attend *Kulturbrücke's* courses annually.

Proposed by Rainer Hellwig



## Gunpowder Factory Liebenau



During World War II, more than 2000 forced labourers were forced to work themselves to death in the gunpowder factory of Liebenau. Today, this site is a place of remembrance and commemoration of the victims. It also serves as a platform for international cultural exchange – thanks to dedicated members of the association *Gunpowder Factory Liebenau*.

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## Dedicated Citizens Keep Commemoration Alive

The apparent serenity is misleading: aerial photographs show an idyllic village in Lower Saxony's Nienburg district, with traditional brick houses surrounded by tall trees, the village encompassed by thick forests and wide fields. The Nazis created this false serenity during World War II in order to hide the gunpowder factory from the enemies' fighter jets. In the summer of 1939, Wolff and Co. from the city of Walsrode began to build a gunpowder factory between Liebenau and Steyerberg villages. The factory consisted of 400 buildings, which were erected on an area of 12 square kilometres. Between 1941 and 1945 the factory produced more than 40,000 tons of ammunition, predominantly flak ammunition.

Liebenau was one of the gunpowder factories in which around 80 percent of the workers were forced and foreign labourers. Old population registries name more than 11,000 foreign labourers. Many of them had to stay in what was literally called "work education camp" (*Arbeitserziehungslager*), opened in Liebenau by the "Secret State Police" (*Gestapo*) in 1940. Barracks of the camp were surrounded by barbed wire and the situation for internees was "basically similar to the circumstances in a Nazi concentration camp", as investigations by the Public Prosecutor's Office of Verden in 1961 showed. Malnutrition, abuse and lack of medical care caused the death of a large number of camp prisoners.



Buildings of the former factory, erected by the camp prisoners, still exist. The association converted parts of them into an information centre called *Dokumentationsstelle Pulverfabrik Liebenau*. This centre aims at keeping the remembrance of crimes committed here alive. The idea to start the association was inspired by the visit of a Ukrainian woman – a former forced labourer at Liebenau. Eventually, the greater municipality Liebenau and the market town of Steyerberg founded the association. Its members offer guided tours to the former factory site, invite contemporary witnesses to describe their survival experience and organize project days for school classes. They also gather and document historical information about the site through publications, lectures, seminars and exhibitions. Furthermore, the association members are planning to create a proper memorial-site at Liebenau as a place for remembrance and commemoration of the victims of forced labour.

Young members of the association started a working group in 2002 in order to deal with the historical meaning of the Liebenau site in their own manner. They also raise funds in support of former victims of forced labour. Besides, youth exchanges with students from Ukraine and Germany are organized at the former gunpowder factory of Liebenau once or twice a year.

*Proposed by Manfred Sanftleben*

**Medical Aid Organization for Refugees, Göttingen**  
**Action Group *Health Care for All***



The action group *Health Care for All* campaigns for access to public medical care for refugees without residence permit. Besides providing palpable support to those in need, it also raises public awareness about the precarious situation of the so-called illegal aliens through lobbying.

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**Illness does not Ask for an ID Card**

Going to a doctor when one is feeling ill is something taken for granted by most people in Germany. Not so for refugees who do not have a residence permit. As so-called illegal aliens, they neither have a health insurance nor can they afford to pay for medical treatment. Visiting a doctor puts them at risk of being exposed and deported. This sometimes causes delay in seeking treatment, also in case of serious illnesses.

A study conducted on behalf of the city of Munich showed that people without residence permit are generally excluded from health care and education services. The action group *Health Care for All* from Göttingen provides access to health care for refugees. Its members are in contact with doctors offering them treatment free of charge and irrespective of their legal status. Even a few hospitals are part of this network, which provide inpatient treatment and urgently required surgeries.

Furthermore, the action group raises awareness about the devastating social situation of refugees without residence permit and calls upon the local government of Göttingen to provide a communal solution to this problem. Another important issue is the right to education for all children, irrespective of their legal status or their refugee-parents.

Due to the efforts and lobbying of the action group, Göttingen now endorses the *Manifesto on Illegal Immigration*, drafted by the Catholic Forum *Life in Illegality*. It demands a nuanced and solution oriented discussion about problems of refugees without residence permit.

*Proposed by Achim Rogoss*

**NETZ Bangladesh**

Hunger, poverty and oppression are part of everyday life for many people in Bangladesh. Multinational corporations, especially from the West, profit from this situation, for instance from cheap labour – exploiting textile workers in sweat shops, who have to work under inhumane conditions. NETZ connects lobby work in Europe with tangible project work in Bangladesh.

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**Local Support – Lobby Work in Europe**

Bangladesh is one of the most densely populated countries in the world. Around 140 million people live on 144,000 km<sup>2</sup>, an area, which is about as twice as big as the Southern German state of Bavaria. The annual average income in Bangladesh is approximately 400 Euros. Women, children and members of religious and ethnic minorities in particular suffer from hunger, poverty and oppression.

Aim of NETZ Bangladesh is to support these people. Based in Wetzlar, NETZ, for example, publicly denounces inhumane working conditions in the Bangladeshi textile industry. In autumn 2008, NETZ invited a female sewer as well as a female labour union leader to Germany. Through reports of the two activists' own experience in textile factories, NETZ tried to pressurize ordering companies in Germany to meet their responsibilities.

A survey among textile workers was conducted on behalf of NETZ as part of the Clean Clothes-Campaign. This survey led Tchibo, one of the major German buyers of textile from Bangladesh, to reconsider and eventually change their purchasing policy. The company now makes an effort to urge subcontractors to adhere to social standards.

On initiative of NETZ a network called Bangladesh Forum was founded. This network comprises of various NGOs, associations and scientists doing relief work and supporting local projects in Bangladesh. Members include organizations such as amnesty international, Bread for the World, Church Development Service and Misereor. This forum not only serves as a platform for information-exchange, but also to combine know-how and skills in order to effectively support local civil society in the struggle against hunger and human rights violations. NETZ urges government officials in Germany and of the European Union to keep an eye on the relationship between the Bangladeshi government and NGOs working in the country. International lobbying and publicity is very important in order to pressurize the government and has already shown success: a number of political prisoners were released.

At the local level, NETZ encourages disadvantaged people to stand up for their rights. This already showed positive results: people organize themselves in human rights groups, women protest against rape and child-marriage, they fight against dispossession of land and nepotism. Together with beneficiaries and partner organizations, NETZ has developed concepts for sustainable poverty reduction. For example, setting up of infrastructure for rural self-help groups, trainings and provision of seed capital. Such programmes enable families to support themselves through a regular income within a span of three years. So far, more than 13,000 families have benefited from these activities.

*Proposed by Thilo Hoppe und Ralf Bries*



### OWEN – Mobile Academy for Gender Democracy and Peace Development



In Eastern Europe, socialism is history. The transition to democracy, however, has not yet been completed in many countries of the former Eastern Bloc. This development is threatened by intimidation and totalitarian state behaviour. The Berlin-based association OWEN (Mobile Academy for Gender Democracy and Peace Development) encourages and supports women in Central and Eastern Europe through educational projects enabling them to strengthen civil society.

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### Education to Promote Peace

In the 1980's, many oppositional peace activists in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) took all their courage to protest against the regime. Soon after the iron curtain came down and the GDR became history, a couple of women from this peace movement, who were still in close contact with each other, founded OWEN in Berlin in 1992.

OWEN association focuses especially on women as primary agents of democratic change, civil conflict prevention and peacekeeping activities in post-communist countries. OWEN encourages women to strengthen civil society by providing democratic education. From 1996-1999, the association established an Education and Development Centre for women in Ukraine in order to strengthen local self-help capacities and community work.

Furthermore, OWEN established an international research and educational project entitled *Women's memory – in search of the life and identity of women in socialism*. Various project groups conducted interviews with women born between 1920 and 1960. So far, six hundred interviews have been conducted and transcribed. These biographical histories tell the stories of women from Eastern Germany, Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, Croatia, Serbia, Ukraine and Georgia.

In 2006, OWEN started working on a profound analysis of the historical background, causes, motives and consequences of armed conflicts in the Caucasus region and the role of women and men in such conflicts. This research project is part of the EU-supported-programme *Mobile Friedensakademie OMNIBUS 1325* (mobile peace academy OMNIBUS 1325). Well-experienced peace and human rights activists are part of the omnibus team and travel through the Caucasus region. Thus, a national network of peace and conflict resolution is set up through which experts offer trainings on "gender and peace work" in the region.

These trainings and similar programmes also serve as a platform to exchange information and encourage people from conflict-shattered regions to seek and maintain dialogue – even at times when social taboos or laws suppress their efforts to overcome all divisive boundaries. Their friendship and mutual trust indicate that hostility and violence are not inherent in human nature, no matter how complicated violent conflicts may be – particularly the past ones in the Caucasus region.

*Proposed by Ilse Schimpf-Herken*

**Pastor Karl-Wilhelm ter Horst**

With the beginning of the war on Iraq, Pastor Karl-Wilhelm ter Horst from Schüttrorf near Osnabrück decided to establish a network of organizations protecting deserters from prosecution.

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**Pastor from Lower Saxony Protects Deserters**

On the eve of the war on Iraq, when former US-president George W. Bush demanded Iraqi soldiers to lay down arms, Karl-Wilhelm ter Horst asked himself: What would happen to US-American soldiers if they did the same? Pastor ter Horst decided to give refuge to US as well as British soldiers, who refused to fight and were regarded as war deserters.

Initially ter Horst provided shelter to deserters in the Pastor's house, which was big enough for this purpose. But his idea spread fast and became known, even to the CIA. As a result, he began to establish a small network comprising of individual families, not only from Germany, but also from France, Spain and the Netherlands, willing to provide shelter to deserters from USA as well as other countries: in case their hiding place gets exposed, deserters will be hosted by other families.

In order to protect deserters from being persecuted, Pastor ter Horst also collaborates with other network organizations that provide them support: for example *Connection*, an association which supports conscientious objectors in Germany, as well as the German branch of the *Military Counseling Network*, USA, offering counselling service to war resisters regarding their legal rights. This is of great importance since punishment for "desertion" is severe; professional soldiers who resist war are sentenced to a minimum of 9 months in jail after which they get officially discharged and are never allowed to rejoin military service.

Pastor ter Horst is not afraid of being persecuted. He feels encouraged by a verdict passed immediately after the First Gulf War. At that time, the German scientist and writer Walter Jens provided shelter to a soldier. Charges were dismissed and Jens was found not guilty. "This is a precedent verdict", ter Horst says. "If I had done it in the USA, I probably would have been put in jail immediately."

In Germany however, Pastor ter Horst was praised for his commitment. "After having been interviewed in a TV-show, I received hundreds of E-Mails in which people offered their support to provide shelter to war resisters", he recalls. "Even army officers of the German *Bundeswehr* expressed their appreciation."

*Proposed by Achim Rogoss*

### Citizen Action Group FREIE HEIDE (Free Heathland)



Persistence mostly pays off, as the commitment of the citizens action group *FREIE HEIDE* shows. For almost 17 years, group members have been organizing inspiring and peaceful protests against continuing military training operations of German armed forces (Bundeswehr) on a former Soviet Army-training area, located around 100 km northwest of Berlin. In July 2009, the protesters finally succeeded. The federal German government gave in and announced to discontinue military training.

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### March Evolved from Protest into Celebration

What started as a protest march turned into a celebration: „Die Heide ist frei!“ (Heathland is free!) These words were heard everywhere on Sunday, 12th of July 2009. On this day, 2000 people gathered in Sewekow, Northern Brandenburg, in order to protest against the so-called Bombodrom. The march evolved into a frolicking party, because three days earlier, the German Minister of Defence, Mr. Franz-Josef Jung, publicly refrained from earlier plans to use the site at Kyritz-Ruppiner Heide as a training area for aerial bombing.

The action group *FREIE HEIDE* succeeded after a long struggle. Committed citizens founded this group almost 17 years ago, on August 23rd 1992, in Schweinrich. Its actions were directed against the continuous use of a military training site in Kyritz-Ruppiner Heide spread out over an area of 144 square kilometers. In former times, this site was used as a training area for troops. After the wall came down, the Federal Government wanted to make use of it as a training area for aerial bombing.

Citizens joined protests for various reasons such as peace, environment as well as individual reasons: Who would like super-loud fighter jets (loaded with training bombs) constantly flying above ones own house? Furthermore, many local people feared negative consequences on tourism to this highly attractive region. In 2004, some regional business people started an initiative called *Pro Heide* in order to raise awareness on possible negative consequences for the local economy.

The persistent protests also forced the regional government of Brandenburg in the same year to take an independent stance on this issue. The regional government and parliamentarians voted for a peaceful, civil use of the disputed site in Kyritz-Ruppiner Heide. Opposition also grew in the neighbouring state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, which would also have been affected because of the entry lane for fighter jets. An action group called *Freier Himmel* (free sky) also lobbied against the plans and succeeded: a multipartisan agreement was signed and the plans were rejected.

Some of the biggest peace protest marches in Germany took place in Kyritz-Ruppiner Heide and *FREIE HEIDE* also organized various other events, supported and joined by artists, politicians, church organizations and federations. Around 350000 people participated in these activities over the years, focusing on the Integrity of Creation in this particular region as well as on nonviolent conflict resolution. The activists are finally relieved: „Heathland is free“.

*Proposed by Ellen Ueberschär*

## Women Daring Peace



Women Daring Peace, an activist group from Palatinate in Germany deals with many pressing political and social issues of the day: from Middle East Conflict, renewable energies and the establishing of a European Constitution to creating a more just and equitable world economic order. Its members intervene in public discourse and have their say on these issues.

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## Persistent Commitment Towards a More Humane Society

Their strength lies in their tenacity: twenty seven years ago, activists of *Women Daring Peace* came together for the first time, committed to justice, peace and the integrity of creation. Since then, they have been meeting once a month in Kaiserslautern in order to plan their activities. *Women Daring Peace* is an ecumenical group, affiliated to the Women's Department at the Centre for Education and Society, which is part of the local protestant church.

While focus of activism has shifted, their commitment remains the same. During the 1980s for example, they advocated a boycott of goods from South Africa under the apartheid regime. Today, *Women Daring Peace* fights against forced prostitution and advocates for closure of the US-nuclear weapons depot in Büchel, situated in the Eifel Mountains. They also work on an initiative on debt relief for developing countries, actions against violence in the media and organize peace devotions in front of the Ramstein US-Air Base: the reasons for intervention are as diverse as its methods. Members join protest marches, organize campaigns, gather signatures for protest petitions, write letters of complaint to newspaper editors as well as open letters to politicians and church representatives and also bring various pressing issues to the attention of the regional church synod. Furthermore, *Women Daring Peace* networks with and supports many regional and national organizations working on peace building and development policy.

Monthly group meetings are attended by up to 20 women from all over the Rhineland-Palatinate state. Study days and weekend seminars are held to deepen debate on specific topics such as climate change, militarization or on the significance of Local Agenda 21. *Women Daring Peace* informs people about planned activities and invites sympathizers to join its efforts through a mailing list comprising 250 addresses. The activists initiate and accompany reflection within the church as well as in society as a whole. They are not afraid to swim against the tide or put forward provocative viewpoints for discussion in order to make a change. It is not for nothing that they are called *Women Daring Peace* – a motto, which goes back to an insight formulated by the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer: "There is no way towards peace on the path of security, because peace must be dared."

*Proposed by Erika Christmann*





**Europe**

## Coventry Peace House



Some people may stay for just a night, others for about a month. Several stay even for a year at *Coventry Peace House*, where asylum seekers can find a place to sleep, are offered food and treated with dignity. These people hoped for a better life in Great Britain – hopes, which have gone up in smoke.

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## Food, Shelter and a Little Dignity

*Coventry Peace House* is located on a lively street in the heart of multicultural Coventry. It is a very special place: Members of a housing co-operative live under its roof and a peace- and environment-centre is also housed here. Young people as well as adults run a global and intergenerational project called *World Wise*. Among other things, members of the project cook and provide vegetarian food, repair and then sell old, donated bicycles. However, main focus of the project is on the needs and concerns of asylum seekers.

Penny Walker, the driving force behind the project and co-founder, says: "It is important to keep the doors wide open to those people, who were locked up in detention-centres for months, sometimes even for years. In most of the cases, the home countries denied reentry to the asylum seekers and the British Government on the other hand does not know what to do with these people."



These people are excluded from society: they neither get a permanent stay permit nor a work permit. Many of them live in constant fear of being deported to their country of origin. Volunteers of *Coventry Peace House* may not be able to solve these fundamental problems. But, not less important, their support is focused on very practical things: providing shelter, food and giving these migrants something, which they did not get for a very long time: a good amount of respect.

Residents, overnight-guests and volunteers have jointly published two books, dealing with the problems of asylum seekers and stateless persons. *Coventry Peace House* also uses commemorative days such as the „National Day to Defend Asylum Rights“ to advocate for the rights of asylum seekers.

The idea of starting such a peace project came up about 11 years ago. The co-founders' ideal was to create a community, which is based on the principles of non-violence. Coventry seemed to be the perfect place for their vision. In World War II, the city of Coventry was one of the main production-sites of the arms industry and was completely destroyed in 1940 by the Nazi's *Wehrmacht*. Furthermore, founders of the *Peace House* were concerned about violence in many big cities, which has become part of everyday life.

Deeply engrossed in her peace work, Penny Walker forgets time: "Her energy is admirable", says a friend. She took her last vacation six years ago. While on vacation, she went to join a 60-mile protest march against nuclear weapons. As her friend puts it: "Only Penny would call this vacation".

*Proposed by Jenny Maxwell*

**Alexander Shekhotkin**

A doctorate at the age of 24, scholarship awarded for studies in Wisconsin, USA, establishing an organization working successfully for handicapped people: Alexander Shekhotkin's list of accomplishments is remarkable. What's even more impressive is how Alexander Shekhotkin succeeded in life despite trying circumstances.

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**Overcoming Barriers and Promoting Individual Potential**

Since Alexander Shekhotkin was ten years old, he has been suffering from a very rare progressive neuromuscular disease, which severely limits his mobility. Today, at the age of 39, Shekhtokin lives in Simferopol, capital of the Autonomous Ukrainian Republic of Crimea. Due to the help of his caring parents as well as personal dedication and efforts, Alexander Shekhotkin successfully completed school and university studies. He also received a doctorate in Biology when he was 24 years old.

Alexander Shekhotkin's commitment towards a dignified and self-determined life for the handicapped brought him into contact with PHAB, a British charity organization working for disabled people. He opened a PHAB-branch office in Simferopol in 1998 and is, since then, tirelessly working towards equal rights for people of all abilities.



In 2004, Shekhtokin received a scholarship and went to do research in Wisconsin, USA. During his 4-month stay, he observed and studied the disability rights situation in the USA. His observations were in stark contrast to the situation in Ukraine, where disabled people are virtually excluded from public life: many public institutions, administrative buildings and libraries do not have elevators, only 16% of the challenged who are able to work, actually have employment, and social stigma is also a major problem. To many people in Ukraine, it seems almost like a punishment if a challenged baby is born.

Alexander Shekhotkin persistently works to fight against these circumstances. He founded –and financed with modest means– a workshop, so that handicapped people can earn part of their livelihood rather independently. He is also in charge of the *Young Leader Club* encouraging young adults without disability to campaign for the needs and rights of handicapped people.

With the help of the United Nations Shekhotkin also founded a computer club for challenged children and adolescents, many of which do not have any Internet skills. They now have access to the Internet and acquire IT skills at the club, thus being prepared for their working life.

Furthermore, he advocates for the removal of architectural barriers to handicapped people in Ukraine. This seems to be a mammoth task: the footpaths are inaccessible and badly maintained while public transport does not meet the needs of handicapped people. However, slowly Alexander Shekhotkin's voice is being heard in Ukrainian politics and he has come to be known as the "advocate of the challenged". His life bears witness to the fact that challenged people can achieve a lot more than many Ukrainian people may imagine.

*Proposed by Christiane Stürmann*

**Maite Pagazaurtundúa**

Maite Pagazaurtundúa's brother and four friends were killed by the Basque separatist group Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA). She has to rely on bodyguards for protection, even when she takes out garbage. However, Maite continues to work diligently towards human rights and democracy in the Basque Country – a perilous commitment.

Maite Pagazaurtundúa  
 ¡Basta Ya!  
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**Standing Up Against Climate of Fear in the Basque Country**

“¡Basta Ya!” – “Enough is Enough!” – This is exactly the motto that reflects Maite Pagazaurtundúa's thoughts on Basque nationalism and attacks by ETA. “¡Basta Ya!” is the name of this Spanish grassroots organization, which was co-founded by Maite in 2000. Three years later, her brother was shot dead. Joseba, who was a policeman, was on ETA's list since he had organized a small commemoration for a colleague who was also shot dead.

Maite Pagazaurtundúa has lost five loved ones including her brother Joseba – all killed by ETA. She knows the intensity of fanaticism and hatred created by the separatists from her own experience: during her studies, she was threatened by fellow students, because she did not share their goal of a Basque Country independent from Spain.

Maite Pagazaurtundúa is not the only one of this opinion – around half of the Basque population disagrees with separatism. Nevertheless, supporters and activists of ETA have been creating a climate of fear in Northern Spain for decades. As a result, numerous non-nationalists have to be constantly protected by bodyguards in public, just as Maite Pagazaurtundúa. The fact that she is a politician of the Socialist Party in the Basque Country, vice-president of the *Foundation for Victims of Terrorism* and works with “¡Basta Ya!” makes her one of the most prominent ETA-opponents.



There have been reasons enough for Maite Pagazaurtundúa to actually drown in hatred and desperation. However, despite her sorrow on the loss of her brother and friends, she continues to work for a peaceful Basque Country, where everybody shares freedom of expression. In 2004, Maite even published an impressive book on the story of her family (*Los Pagaza. Historia de una familia vasca*).

ETA and the nationalist forces in the Basque Regional Parliament have meanwhile been weakened – also due to Maite Pagazaurtundúa's commitment. This is one of the first and important steps towards permanent peace and coming to terms with the violent past, which have not yet been accomplished. This would need more activists like Maite and her friends from “¡Basta Ya!”.

*Proposed by Stefanie Schüler-Springorum*

**Andreas Maislinger**

Andreas Maislinger tenaciously fights against repression of history and defies convenient answers to an inconvenient truth. Maislinger, who is an Austrian political scientist and historian, has a very critical stance towards Austria's role during the so-called Third Reich: He does not comply with the idea that the Republic of Austria was the Nazi's victim. On the contrary, Austria was in complicity with them and should also be held responsible for the crimes committed. To commemorate these crimes, Maislinger has established a memorial service as an alternative to compulsory community service in Austria.

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**Memorial Service to Uphold Memory**

When Andreas Maislinger articulated his idea of setting up a memorial civil service for the first time, it was met with strong opposition in Austria. Meanwhile, the concept has been well established. Since 1992, when the first servant participated in the memorial service in Auschwitz, Maislinger has successfully established numerous service positions, for example at Yad Vashem, at Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles as well as in Montreal and Shanghai.

Around 30 young Austrian women and men join the 12-month memorial service every year. While men's service is recognized by the Austrian government as a substitute for compulsory civilian service, women can join the memorial service within the framework of the European Voluntary Service program. Memorial servants work in countries in which the Nazis and their myrmidons committed dreadful crimes as well as in countries, where survivors of the Nazi-terror live today. During the one-year service, they take care of youngsters, the aged and work in archives or museums.



The issue of the National Socialists' atrocities and the concern to build a more humane society runs like a thread through Maislinger's life. After completing his PhD at the age of 25, he joined the Poland-unit of *Action Reconciliation Service for Peace* as a volunteer. He worked with German youth groups at the Auschwitz-Birkenau memorial and museum. During this time, Jerzy Adam Brandhuber, who survived Auschwitz, was his close confidant.

Subsequently, Maislinger completed his compulsory alternative service at the *International Fellowship of Reconciliation* in Vienna and also worked together with *Service Civil International (SCI)*. He is co-founder of the Working Group of Independent Peace Initiatives, Austria, and founding member of the Austrian-Israeli Society of Tirol. It was upon Maislinger's initiative that so called *Stolpersteine* ("stumbling blocks") have been embedded in the pavement of Braunau city, birth place of Adolf Hitler, in order to commemorate the victims of National Socialism. Maislinger is scientific director of the annual *Braunau Contemporary History Days* since 1992. He also heads the *Ignaz-Glaser-Symposium*, held every two years in Bürmoos near Salzburg since 2006. In the same year, he initiated the *Austrian Holocaust Memorial Award*, given to people who have made outstanding contributions to commemorate the Shoah.

*Proposed by Angelika Trawöger*



**Asia and Middle East**

### Women's Committee within United NGO Mission – Manipur



*Together we are stronger* – this deep conviction brought activists from different non-government organizations (NGOs) in the Indian state of Manipur together. Ongoing armed conflicts in Manipur, which threaten their project work, made cooperation indispensable and led them to set aside ethnic differences and single-interest issues that may have been dominant in the past. Meanwhile, a strong NGO-network has been established, including a preeminent women's committee.

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### Working Together for Peace and Women's Rights

The Indian state of Manipur, located in the east of the country, has been a trouble spot of the subcontinent for many decades: More than 40 insurgent groups, made up of altogether 50,000 militants from different ethnicities, not only fight against the Indian army but also against each other. Armed conflicts in Manipur began around 60 years ago: At the end of British colonial rule in India, members of the Naga, the largest ethnic group in the North of Manipur, wanted to become independent by founding their own State. Their struggle began with the fight for independence and continues till today.

When the armed conflict intensified in the mid-1990s, a number of non-government organizations in Manipur realized the need to work together in order to be able to keep their projects alive. At this point, United NGO Mission – Manipur (UNMM) came into existence. The member organizations of UNMM represent all ethnic groups and jointly strive for a peaceful living in Manipur. They do lobby-work with state officials and organize campaigns to convince their fellow citizens and members of the insurgent groups to lay down guns. Over the years, a strong network of around 200 member organizations from all districts of Manipur has been formed. The activists working with these civil society organizations come from different ethnic and religious backgrounds. This diversity facilitates access to various groups, institutions, to the state administration, politicians and even to ideological hardliners.

Member organizations of the UNMM-network enable people to better understand political, economical and social aspects of the conflict affecting their lives. Their aim is to develop creative, non-violent strategies of conflict resolution in order to prevent violent clashes. It is a long and difficult path to peace, which demands mutual trust and overcoming ethnic prejudices as well as growing hostility.

In 2003, UNMM conducted a pilot study, which revealed how armed conflicts and state of war in Manipur affect people, especially women, and hinder their development. Since then, male and female activists work together to end discrimination against women and try to promote gender equality within their own organizations. As a result, a central women's committee and more than 50 other women's organizations were founded.

Women's groups within the UNMM are courageously working to end violence. For example, the organization Meira Paibi (torch-bearing women) works as a watchdog-group. Its members keep night vigils holding up Meiras (torches) and chase armed men in order to prevent them from killing. Furthermore, Meira Paibi along with other women activists went on hunger strike demanding withdrawal of Indian troops from Manipur. In 2004, a group of women gathered in front of the Indian Army headquarter in Imphal and undressed in protest against sexual violence towards women. No matter how diverse these women's groups in midst of Manipur's patriarchal society are – their commitment towards peace and women's rights unites them.

*Proposed by Hagen Berndt*

### Archbishop Thomas Menamparambil



In Assam, a state located in the Northeast of India, the voice of the Catholic Church is not really heard. This is due to its minority position. Nevertheless, Thomas Menamparambil, Bishop of Guwahati province, has managed to successfully mediate in armed conflicts between different ethnic groups.

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### Courageous Peace Mediator

Western Assam was hit by the surge of violence without any prior indications: In 1996, members of the Bodo-ethnic group attacked their neighbours of other ethnic origin. During this clash, 250 people were killed and around 250000 were displaced. Bodo are indigenous people from this region, whereas other ethnic groups were resettled here in the 19th century. A couple of election defeats sparked an outrage among the Bodos, who had long been advocating for autonomy within the state of Assam.

Archbishop Thomas Menamparambil immediately organized extensive support for people affected by the riots and put up in refugee camps. Under his auspices, more than 400 Catholics – priests, nuns, novices, seminarians, doctors and nurses – joined him in his efforts by doing voluntary relief work in these camps.



Furthermore, Archbishop Menamparambil began to successfully intensify links with other denominations and founded a joint peace team. Initially, people never thought this ecumenical peace team could play an essential role in peace promotion and reconciliation, since Christians represent only a very small percentage of the population in Western Assam. Besides, it was seen to be extremely difficult to bring together representatives from the two different ethnic groups and initiate dialogue between them.

Despite the fact that prospects of success were very low, Archbishop Menamparambil, in the name of the peace team, invited representatives of the opposing groups to a round table in order to promote peace dialogue. His initiative was welcomed by the people. Core-negotiations took three days, accompanied by manifold activities such as peace marches and seminars as well as distribution of leaflets and brochures on the issue.

Peace did not come soon. Much time passed until people staying in the refugee camp had the courage to return to their villages. Today, more than ten years after the violent conflicts, peaceful cooperation between the formerly opposing ethnic groups has resumed. Thomas Menamparambil's good reputation as a peace mediator has spread to many other provinces of India. Thus, it is no surprise that he has been invited to other regions of Northeastern India as a mediator and – together with his peace team – has repeatedly contributed to peace and conflict resolution.

*Proposed by Doctors for Developing Countries Committee*

**Fauzia Aziz Minallah**

Art education is a privilege in Pakistan, available only to a very few children. Fauzia Aziz Minallah wants to democratize art education and makes it accessible to kids from low-income families, so that they too can playfully discover their own creativity.

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**Teaching Kids Peace Through Art**

*Amal Park*, located in Islamabad, capital of Pakistan, is one of the outstanding projects by Fauzia Aziz Minallah. It's a school-playground designed for the special needs of blind and virtually handicapped children. This playground is special since these kids participated in the process of designing it. They put forth their own ideas without any assistance from their teachers. Many of these children come from battered families, where frustration, violence, money troubles and lack of future prospects are part of everyday-life.

Fauzia Aziz Minallah encourages these children to trust their own abilities and develop self-confidence. In this process, boys and girls learn what it means to be truly appreciated. This is a place, where the kids have equal rights and where a peaceful living is possible – a stark contrast to their experience within their own families. Minallah, who is also an artist, uses art as a vehicle to prevent violence, which often arises out of frustration and desperation. For her, art is one of the strongest pillars of peace – this becomes obvious while observing her in action.



Minallah heads a small institution called "Funkor Child Art Center Pakistan". At this center, thousands of Pakistani children have learnt how inspiring artwork can be. In Germany, using watercolours and pencils is a matter of course. This is not the case in Pakistan: art education is only given in private schools which are attended by children from privileged families alone.

Besides her commitment to the organization, Fauzia Aziz Minallah also works as an author and illustrator of children's books, one of them titled „Amal's wish". Not only through her art projects, but also through this story, Minallah makes kids understand that a world based on mutual respect is possible.

*Proposed by Katrin Becker*

**Heny Yudea**

Heny Yudea has been working with small farming families in Indonesia for 19 years – protecting them against vulnerability. She is the co-founder and initiator of LESSAN. Together with her team, Yudea raises awareness among farmers about the dangers of corporate biopiracy and is committed to preservation of biodiversity.

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**Fighting Biopirates**

When Heny Yudea talks about her work, Don Quixote's attack on windmills comes to mind. Small farmers are confronted with multinational corporate giants, trying to issue patents for traditional Indonesian herbal medicines. These are part of the traditional Indonesian system of medicine and also of the farmers' culture. They find it unimaginable that a signed treaty could forbid the production of remedies, which were already used by their ancestors to cure illnesses.

"They don't understand that profit-hungry corporations from rich countries want to steal what is actually our common property", says Heny Yudea. While listening to the 41-year-old Yudea, it becomes immediately clear that for her this issue goes beyond the mere question of prescriptions for herbal medicines. It's about the life-prospects of farmers, preservation of biodiversity as well as about self-determination in a poverty-stricken country like Indonesia. "Indigenous medicine is of great importance in Indonesia – especially for the poor, who cannot afford to consult a doctor or to pay for hospitalization", she says.



Furthermore, harvest of herbs and extraction of medicinal substances is the only way to generate a small income for many farmers. However, multinational companies (MNCs) have already issued patents on more than 40 plant substances, which originally belong to the traditional Indonesian system of medicine. In case farmers continue to produce their remedies, the MNCs are in a position to extract royalties or even sue them.

Heny Yudea and her team attend to 800 farmers and raise awareness about biopiracy, encourage them to counter the patenting of traditional medicines and support their efforts to continue marketing traditional medicines. "We should preserve and protect this traditional knowledge. If we do not do so, Indonesia will lag behind economically."

Yudea dedicates her work to the protection of biodiversity: "We have to preserve indigenous seeds and resist biopiracy by corporations", she says. The Indonesian Government does not support Yudea's efforts. Despite this fact, she does not seem to be filled with bitterness. She is rather small and graceful in appearance, with an open gaze and a disarming smile. Looking at her, one cannot imagine that her life has been difficult at times: Her father died when she was five years old. She then had to grow up in four different families because her mother was too poor to support five children on her own. Heny Yudea knows that life's lessons can be hard and this inspires her to help others.

*Proposed by Eva König-Werner*

### WADI Association for Crisis Assistance and Development Co-operation



WADI focuses its work mainly on advocating for women's rights in the Kurdistan region of northern Iraq. It carries out grass-root development work with the guiding principle of commitment to a free democratic society.

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### Freedom Begins in the Minds

WADI, a German-Iraqi NGO, was founded by students in 1991 in the aftermath of the Gulf War. Its main goal is to actively support people in countries of the Middle East and to raise awareness in Germany about the human rights situation in this region. As a result, WADI has been working on projects in the Kurdistan Region of northern Iraq for 18 years. More than 8000 women have so far participated in education programmes run by this Association for Crisis Assistance and Development Co-operation.

WADI successfully supported efforts of local women's groups to establish women's centers in a region, which used to be ruled by Islamic fundamentalists. The centers offer literacy courses, vocational training, for example in sewing and hair-dressing as well as computer and Internet courses. Through these courses women acquire skills, which help them to earn their livelihood. Additionally, they can participate in seminars on health care, sexuality and women's rights.



Furthermore, a kindergarten for refugees' children was set up; prisoners were provided with vocational training in handcraft jobs as well as computer technology. They were also supported in self-publishing of newspapers and books. WADI also runs an emphatic, well laid out campaign to stop traditional female genital mutilation.

The Association is based in Frankfurt (Main), Germany. It is a nonpartisan organization but still takes a stand on issues of concern: WADI's staff members are convinced that being active in the field of development co-operation means taking sides. They believe that relief operations and commitment to freedom and human rights are inextricably connected. "Supposedly unbiased development co-operation may turn out to be deeply biased if root causes of poverty are not taken into consideration and if co-operation avails of existing structures, which actually reinforce injustice and poverty", as WADI explicates on its website.

WADI association encourages people in northern Iraq to take matters into their own hands and to bring about positive change through self-empowerment. This experience, as WADI argues, is an important step to prevent fundamentalism: "Nationalist and political Islamic ideologies, which demand total subjugation, won't fall on fertile ground when people are self-confident and have learnt to autonomously decide about their own interests." According to WADI, democratization in Iraq is doomed to failure, if applied solely as a top-down strategy. Rather, democracy should "infiltrate" all aspects of everyday life and impact all members of society.

*Proposed by Anne Mollenhauer*

## Free Gaza



The *Free Gaza Movement* started in August 2008 with a courageous plan: two fishing boats with 44 passengers from 17 countries sailed to the port of besieged Gaza. These boats were carrying humanitarian aid supplies and its passengers had an invitation by the Palestinian National Authority and were determined not to get threatened by Israeli authorities.

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## Setting Sail for Freedom's Shore

Greta Berlin takes the Israeli government at its word: „Israel says that Gaza is no longer occupied. Well, if that is true, then we have every right to visit“, says Berlin, who is a businesswoman from Los Angeles and one of the founders of the *Free Gaza Movement*. Berlin also participated in the first voyage to Gaza in August 2008 during which the two boats encountered rough seas, were tracked and blocked by Israeli naval vessels. Nevertheless, they arrived safely in Gaza port after over 30 hours at sea and were welcomed by tens of thousands of Palestinians lining the shore.

Aboard the ships were students, human-rights activists, development aid workers, lawyers and journalists. Among the passengers was also Holocaust survivor Hedy Epstein. The activists stayed in Gaza for 6 days, visited schools and hospitals, delivering urgently required medicines and hearing aids. Furthermore, they accompanied Palestinian fishermen at sea, who were continuously being assaulted by the Israeli navy while fishing. They returned to Cyprus with 7 Palestinians on board. These included 5 people, who could reunite with their families in Cyprus after years of separation. Also on board was a 15-year-old boy, who lost his leg in an Israeli attack. Accompanied by his father, he travelled to obtain medical treatment in Cyprus.



Until July 2009, *Free Gaza* has sailed from Cyprus to the Gaza Strip on eight successful voyages. The movement peacefully demands freedom for Palestinians and raises awareness through its voyages about the situation in Gaza. During the last voyage in June 2009 the Israeli navy intimidated the passengers aboard the „Spirit of Humanity“ threatening to open fire. This boat, loaded with medical aid, was hijacked by soldiers and forced to head for Israel, where 21 passengers were arrested for many days. The incident resulted in big media coverage all over the world. Many countries harshly criticized Israel's reaction. Richard Falk, UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, issued a formal statement calling Israel's action "unlawful", re-iterating the need to end the Israeli blockade.

*Free Gaza's* activists try not to get discouraged by Israel's attacks: „History demonstrates that the greatest of injustices can crumble in the blink of an eye when confronted with a well-organized and determined resistance“, as the movement's website states. „We will sail again, and we are absolutely determined to reach the Gaza strip on our next voyage.“

*Proposed by Edith Rubinstein*

**EcoPeace | Friends of the Earth Middle East**



*EcoPeace / Friends of the Earth Middle East (FoEME)* was founded in 1992 and brings together local politicians from Israel, Palestine and Jordan to jointly deal with urgent environmental issues. Such cross border co-operation is a necessity, despite all political differences.

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**Environmental Activism Fostering Peace**

Water knows no boundaries, also in the Middle East. Israelis, Palestinians as well as Jordanians are dependent on the same natural resources, such as rivers, springs and lakes. However, sixty years of overdevelopment, war and occupation have taken their toll in this region: the eco system is out of balance. Waters of the Lake of Gennesaret are at their lowest level on record and the Dead Sea is drying up. "The Holy Land is dying of thirst", as Time Magazine put it in October 2008. The article concluded that this is one of the most passionately contested parts of the world, and also one of the worst treated.

*Friends of the Earth Middle East* initiates negotiations between politicians, who have never worked together before. Talks held between town mayors from the Israeli-Palestinian as well as Israeli-Jordanian border regions were successful: five agreements were signed and they have implemented a couple of joint venture environmental projects.



One of these projects aims at improving water quality of the river Jordan: two Israeli and one Jordanian mayor decided to create a cross border park as protected area that would stretch along the banks on both sides of the river. During negotiations they realized the advantages of such an area: it will provide greater opportunities for biodiversity protection, cooperative management, joint research and education programmes as well as collaboration on nature-based tourism.

Elsewhere, a Palestinian mayor and a colleague from Israel succeeded in passing a law that prohibits sewage collection tanks. This kind of sewage disposal polluted jointly used groundwater. As a result, both municipalities decided to pipe sewage into a newly built treatment plant on Israeli ground. Furthermore, they agreed to intensify cooperative efforts to protect their shared environmental heritage.

In its first years of existence, *Friends of the Earth Middle East* made efforts to put environmental issues onto the Middle East peace process agenda. But after peace talks collapsed in 2000, it turned that strategy on its head and started using environmental issues to foster peace. Talks initiated by FoEME led to trust and mutual respect between local politicians, which provide a basis for cooperation and peace. This is also reflected in FoEME's motto: "Good water makes good neighbours".

*Proposed by Eugene Clancy*

## Rabbis for Human Rights



*Rabbis for Human Rights* tenaciously works to end violence in Israel. The organization consists of around 90 ordained rabbis, who are committed to remind Israelis of the fact that Jewish faith and protection of human rights are inextricably linked.

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## Commitment to Justice is Rooted in Faith

*Rabbis for Human Rights* (RHR) are of diverse Jewish denominations – orthodox or reform Judaism among others. However, they all share a common vision: freedom, justice and peace in Israel. The Rabbis emphasize that moral duty to protect human rights lies within Jewish religious tradition. The holy scriptures state that humanity is created in the Divine Image: All human beings are created in God's image equal rights and dignity.

Rabbis repeatedly point out that there is a strong bond between Jewish faith and advocating for human rights – especially in seminars conducted for conscripted Israelis, soldiers and students. Its university programmes combine study of Torah texts with palpable human rights work, as exemplified in the women's group *Sisters for Peace*, in which Jewish and Bedouin women work together.

*Rabbis for Human Rights* was founded in 1988 and is based in Jerusalem. Together with his fellow rabbis, Arik W. Ascherman, the executive director, advocates for justice. Their *Lev Hadera* project for example informs unemployed of their rights and assists in appellate procedures when their benefits are unjustly terminated.

Furthermore, RHR seeks justice for Palestinians, for instance by helping them to get access to their fields and olive orchards, especially during planting and harvest seasons. Rabbis organized tree-planting activities in the border regions, in which hundreds of Israelis and Palestinians jointly participated. RHR also seeks to prevent the demolition of Palestinian buildings by Israeli authorities: these buildings may have been erected without permits since it is almost impossible for Palestinians to get such a permit. The legal department of RHR has turned to the court in order to prevent illegal seizure of Palestinian land and advocates for the abolition of outdated and unjust laws discriminating against Palestinians living in the Occupied Territories. These activities are based on RHR's guiding principle from psalm 106: "Happy are they that keep justice, that do righteousness at all times."

*Proposed by Rabbi Michael J. Schwartz*





**Central America, Africa, Worldwide**

### Carmen Cumez



Thirteen years have passed since the Civil War in Guatemala ended. However, many wounds have not yet healed. The war lasted for 36 years and hundreds of thousands of Guatemalans suffered, were traumatized by its violence and the feeling of sheer helplessness. The conflict has widowed about 40,000 women. Carmen Cumez, through the relief organization CONAVIGUA, supports war widows in the process of social reintegration. From her own experience she knows about the hardships these women are going through.

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### Encouraging Woman with Traumatic Life Story

Until today Carmen Cumez does not know what has happened to her husband. He was a dedicated activist and catechist and was dragged away from their small farm in 1981. No trace of him has been found so far. Carmen struggled to survive and had to go into hiding with her three children, one of them suffering from polio.

Theirs is one of the many war fates in Guatemala – a civil war, which was one of the bloodiest in the history of Latin America. Between 1960 and 1996, more than 200,000 Guatemalan people were killed or became victims of forced disappearance. Ten million people were made refugees, 200,000 orphaned and 40,000 women were widowed. Despite the fact that the UN created a truth commission in order to clarify and inform about what had really happened during the war, its mandate was not far-reaching at all. Guatemalan post-war society still faces injustice today as war crimes continue to remain unpunished. As a consequence, victims virtually have to live next door with their tormentors, who can proceed in life without fear of being brought to justice.

In spite or because of her traumatizing experience, Carmen Cumez began to work for the *National Coordination of Guatemalan Widows*, CONAVIGUA, during the final years of the war. This organization plays a crucial role in reintegrating widows into society. Carmen, who got elementary formal education, learned a second Maya-language in order to be able to work with the widowed women. Furthermore, she completed trainings on team leading and trauma work. Everytime a new mass grave is discovered, Carmen's haunting past comes to life. While she accompanies relatives, who search and eventually may find remains of their loved ones in these graves, she frequently asks herself, if her husband is also among these victims.



Nevertheless, she conducts workshops and encourages widowed women to get back to their villages and participate in public village life, to be more self-confident and demand their rights. At the same time, she animates them to actively participate in trauma healing and to deal with their experience of violence, which will help them overcome their feelings of helplessness and vulnerability.

*Proposed by Beate Neuhaus*

## Sister Godelive Miburo



Sister Godelive Miburo helps victims who were the most affected by the civil war in Burundi: prisoners, widows, war- and AIDS-orphans. In the midst of war's turmoil, Sr. Godelive set up a multiethnic relief team whose projects bring new hope to Burundian people.

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## Bridge-Builder of Burundi

Sr. Godelive began working with the Congregation of *Missionary Sisters of Mary Mother of Reconciliation* in 1997, a time of hardships. In the midst of civil war, plundering gangs attempting to demand ransom repeatedly raided buildings and fields of this newly founded congregation. Therefore, security systems had to be set up. Simultaneously, Sr. Godelive's work with war victims – a task that really matters to her – had to continue: taking care of children who have lost their parents and of women who were widowed and mourned the loss of their husbands.

Even in these difficult circumstances Sr. Godelive, who is reverend mother of the Congregation, remains cool and calm, never losing her compassion. She set up a team of eleven nuns and about 50 sister novices, dedicating their work to the victims of war. Sr. Godelive established a network of foster families taking care of orphaned children until they find a new permanent family. Widows are also supported at the congregation and receive psychosocial care as well as spiritual guidance. Furthermore, nuns help them with household work, raising their own children or fostering an orphaned child. They also encourage women to plant gardens in order to be able to sustain themselves. As an incentive, they are given one goat that provides them with milk and manure for the garden.

Members of the congregation come from all walks of life and different ethnic groups – contrary to the experience of the majority of Burundians, this does not lead to conflict. The nuns feel that they are called by God to „live“ and to promote reconciliation. This is also the guiding principle of the Missionary founded in 1995 by the Archbishop of Gitega, Monsignor Simon Ntamwana in response to the cruelties of civil war. Although the war ended in 2005, the spiral of violence still threatens Burundi: Gaps have widened between Hutu, Tutsi and Twas, between rich and poor, orphaned and non-orphaned children, refugees and natives.



Sr. Godelive and her team are guided by the philosophy of building bridges and promoting reconciliation. Therefore, they dedicate themselves to the needs of those who have been excluded from society: they support minor mothers in taking care of their children and returning refugees, whose fields are now occupied by others. Another difficult task on their agenda is to reconcile former combatants of opposing groups in order to achieve a peaceful coexistence. Sr. Godelive succeeded: she managed to break barriers between a former army officer and leader of a rebel group. Even such tough men of war are not left unimpressed with Sister Godelive's kindness and determination.

*Proposed by Jean-Denis Renaud*

## Alyn Ware / PNND



A world without nuclear weapons – this is Alyn Ware’s vision. Due to his tireless efforts, a global network could be established in order to provide parliamentarians worldwide a platform for information exchange on nuclear disarmament. This network already has over 500 parliamentary members from 70 countries.

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## An International Network Advocating Nuclear Disarmament

Alyn Ware’s conviction is that great goals can only be achieved by working together with others. In the 1990s, he worked for the UN coordinating the establishment of the International Criminal Court in The Hague. Since then, Alyn Ware’s worldwide contacts have helped the committed peace activist to establish networks and bring people together. Both of these are necessary preconditions for his ambitious project, Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (PNND).

PNND is a global network of parliamentarians initiated by Alyn Ware. This network firstly provides parliamentarians with up to date information on nuclear disarmament and secondly facilitates international exchange on these issues.

PNND therefore collaborates with renowned partner organizations, such as the *Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs*, which were founded by Albert Einstein and Albert Russell. PNND incorporates findings and proposals of these *Conferences* into its own work, which are further distributed and discussed globally within the PNND-network. Besides, knowledge and findings of numerous non-government organizations are integrated into PNND’s work.



PNND serves as “liaison office” for parliamentarians, providing them with information about risk assessment on nuclear weapons as well as on strategies to achieve nuclear disarmament. PNND also supplies its members with samples of parliamentary motions, questions and legislations, which may be used to pass or amend laws in the members’ home countries. In addition, PNND keeps its members informed regarding international political meetings on nuclear disarmament.

This network promotes direct contact between parliamentarians from different countries and provides a platform for exchange of ideas, information and strategies – for example with regard to international events, implementation of disarmament obligations and resolutions of the United Nations. Alyn Ware is committed to ensure that the issue of nuclear disarmament is continuously kept on the political agenda.

*Proposed by Ron McCoy (Malaysia), Peter Becker (Germany), John Scales Avery (Denmark), Kate Dewes (New Zealand), Montserrat Prieto González (Spain), Bob Harvey (New Zealand), John Hallam (Australia), Raphael Chegeni (Tanzania)*

### **About the *Threshold Foundation***

*The Threshold Foundation* and its partners strive to safeguard peace, justice and the integrity of creation. We are convinced that in order to achieve more justice and a peaceful living, social change is needed – not only in war-torn and post-war societies abroad, but also in Germany.

*The Threshold Foundation* therefore cooperates with project partners whose commitment aims at shaping social and societal change through non-violent means and whose work focuses on social justice, implementation and fulfilment of human rights as well as on environmental sustainability. Consequently, the Foundation's work inspires other projects in turn, so that general societal change towards more justice is facilitated. We are currently supporting peace projects in Southeastern Europe, West and Central Africa, Israel, Palestine as well as in Germany (Bremen).

*The Threshold Foundation* was founded in 1979 by Ruth-Christa Heinrichs and Dirk Heinrichs, a stevedoring entrepreneur and Philosopher from Bremen. Wiebke and Reinhard Jung joined in as co-sponsors in 1994.

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Every two years the *Threshold Foundation* awards the Bremen Peace Prize *Courageously Crossing Thresholds* in order to honour individuals and organizations which have made outstanding contributions towards Peace, Justice and the Integrity of Creation. Nominees are proposed by individuals and organizations engaged in peace promotion activities around the world and a jury of the *Foundation* selects the winners. Awards are given in three categories:

- Unknown Peace Worker
- Exemplary Organization
- Public Engagement

The *Threshold Foundation's* Peace Award draws public attention to relatively unknown but exemplary projects of peace promotion. This brochure portrays the award winners as well as 24 selected individuals and organizations, which also show convincing commitment to peace.