



BREMEN PEACE AWARD 2011

Courageously Crossing Thresholds

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Bremen Peace Award of the **Threshold Foundation** for
exemplary commitments to justice, peace and integrity of creation

Welcome note

The Threshold Foundation in Bremen supports with the International Bremen Peace Award organizations and individuals that contribute towards better communication between peoples and nations. They appeal for a deeper understanding of the different (and cultural) conditions for development in various parts of our world. The Foundation's board of trustees gives the International Bremen Peace Award to specific projects which follow these aims. In doing so it acknowledges the relentless effort made to alleviate and if possible overcome the problems of a violent and troubled age by encouraging mutual responsibility as the key to cooperation. This "peace work" is one of the foundation stones for the "Integrity of Creation" and although it rarely receives spectacular public attention, exemplifies the purpose of peace activities.

The Peace Award acknowledges the ceaseless effort of a Bosnian imam to prepare the way for a new form of cooperation for those living in a region greatly troubled – for both political and religious reasons – by the extremes of civil war-like conflicts. His peace work is in stark contrast to the dissociation and discrimination processes taking place in the local community. In recognizing his efforts a plea is made for peaceful communication, even if this commitment is rarely understood by fellow countrymen.



The award for the dedicated prize winner from Sri Lanka also deserves special mention. Her public commitment towards the victims of violence caused through the war in her native country torn by national dispute and her relentless effort to encourage the real victims to fight against discrimination, both make her a role-model for many who understand peace and justice as an important criterion for living together.

The third prize acknowledges the commitment of both the younger and older generations whose multicultural teamwork demonstrates how joint effort and intercultural cooperation can improve the quality of life together, which in turn supports the desired communication between alleged strangers. The prize winners have vividly put into practice the sentence "culture unites worlds". For this they deserve our thanks.

My regards go especially to the prize winners and other distinguished activities which involve active peace work. I thank you and the benefactors and assistants from the Threshold Foundation for your exemplary dedication.

Sincere regards
Hans Koschnick

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2003

Sister Weronika Sakowska, Rwanda
Unknown Peace Worker

Parents Circle – Families Forum, Palestine
Exemplary Organization

Hans Graf von Sponeck, Germany
Public Engagement

2005

Roswitha Jarmann, England
Barbara Gladysch, Germany
Unknown Peace Workers

**Interfaith Mediation Centre,
Pastor Wuye, Imam Ashafa, Nigeria**
Exemplary Organization

Prof. Wassilij B. Nesterenko, Belarus
Public Engagement

2007

Bassam Aramin, Palestine
Unknown Peace Worker

Conciudadanía, Columbia
Exemplary Organization

Wolfgang Kessler, Germany
Public Engagement

2009

Susan Jennifer Gilbey, Australia
Unknown Peace Worker

Animus und Pulse Foundation, Bulgaria
Exemplary Organization

Rubin Phillip, South Africa
Public Engagement

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

Since 2003 the Threshold Foundation has bi-annually awarded the International Bremen Peace Award under the patronage of Hans Koschnick. Each of the three categories receives a prize of 5000 €.

On the 18th November 2011 the Bremen Peace Award will be awarded for the fifth time in the upper chamber of Bremen Town Hall. This brochure also presents 27 further nominated individuals and organizations all worthy of receiving an award.

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."

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!

The Peace Award given by The Threshold Foundation is divided into three categories:

- First and foremost the **Unknown Peace Worker**, i.e. individuals who commit themselves to their cause without a great deal of attention or recognition. This distinguishes our Peace Award from other comparable awards.
- In the second category we honour an Outstanding and **Exemplary Organization** whose activities serve as a role model for other initiatives and organizations.
- In a third category we award a prize for **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 2010 we invited nominations for the award nationally and internationally – the latter primarily via internet. The last date for nomination was in February 2011 and the final decision was made mid April. By the end of February there had been almost 90 nominations compared to 70 in 2009 and 40 in 2007. 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: Proposals again came from all five continents, whereby Latin America – as previously was the case – was not as strongly represented as the other continents.



**The Fifth 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.

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 almost two thirds of the nominees. Most of them also carry out very impressive work, but unfortunately we had to draw the line somewhere.

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.



The Award Winners

As usual, the choice of the three award winners was very difficult for the foundation's board and advisory council. For the first time we have chosen to distinguish a project from Bremen, not simply to preserve local flair but because we believe it can serve as a role-model world-wide.

Our three award winners are honoured on behalf of all other individuals and groups presented in this brochure. They are all distinguished by exemplary dedication, and encourage us to cross thresholds and break vicious circles. They are good news for us all.

Thanks and farewell to our patron Hans Koschnick

The Peace Award ceremony will take place for the last time under the patronage of Bremen's former mayor Hans Koschnick. For reasons of age he has asked us to relieve him from this function. We thank him kindly for his time and effort in making public and supporting the Bremen Peace Award given by the Threshold Foundation.

Reinhard Jung
Chairman of the board of the Threshold Foundation

Vahidin Omanović, Bosnia-Herzegovina



“Striving for peace is my God-given task in life”, Vahidin Omanović says. Within his Centre for Peace Promotion in Sanski Most, the Bosnian imam and peacemaker has created a haven for reconciliation between the peoples and religions within Bosnia-Herzegovina.

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Pearls of the Balkans

“Whenever he talks about peace, he always has something meaningful to say”, one member of a peace camp says about Vahidin Omanović. Many people greatly admire the joy and intensity with which the trained imam campaigns for reconciliation between the peoples of Bosnia-Herzegovina. In his annual camp, Vahidin brings together Bosnians of all ethnic groups and religions: Orthodox Serbian, Catholic Croatian and Muslim. They exchange experiences about the war which shook their country between 1992 and 1995; they talk about wounds which will not heal, pray together and try to solve unresolved conflicts – for the ethnically motivated battles have left deep trenches between the peoples and religions in Bosnia.

Vahidin himself was also traumatized as a result of the violence he and his family suffered during the war. After returning from exile in Slovenia, he found it difficult to accept the Bosnian Serbs in his home town Sanski Most. It was not until 1998, when assistants working in a peace centre asked him to organize a workshop, that he was able to rise above himself – and from that point on he has been campaigning passionately for mutual understanding between former enemies. He took a course in peace studies in the USA and in 2004 founded a Centre for Peace Promotion in Sanski Most. At the heart of its philosophy is Vahidin’s basic principle that people can be reconciled through combining religion and peace work. The dialogue between religions is of essential importance to him and he promotes this in the face of social resistance. The result is an interreligious peace council that has been in existence since 2010 allowing the spiritual leaders of Sanski Most to campaign together for reconciliation.



As his wife provides for the family, Vahidin can invest all his energy in peace work – on a voluntary basis. As a liberal Moslem he stands for an open European form of Islam and rejects religious nationalism. “I am fighting for social change that takes place from the base upwards and to encourage people not to allow politicians to exploit their religious feelings for their own purpose”, Vahidin says. “This is the only way to give peace a chance”.

Proposed by Anna Raffai

Cooperation Project OTe "You always have a choice", Germany



An unusual district musical project is run annually by the German Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra of Bremen and the Comprehensive School Bremen East in cooperation with many inhabitants and initiatives from the underprivileged district of Bremen-Osterholz-Tenever.

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Music unites worlds

It is about a search for meaning, about longing, poverty or power; about politics, friendship, questions about the future and reconciliation. And it is about music, dance, theatre and creativity. Since 2008 the Bremen "cooperation project OTe: You always have a choice" has organized and initiated extensive musical projects of a special kind. The internationally renowned Bremen Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra, the Comprehensive School in Bremen East and many inhabitants and initiatives from the underprivileged district of Osterholz-Tenever have joined forces to make music together and at the same time to deal with the special issues concerning one of the home countries of those living in the multicultural district. Together the orchestra and pupils develop musical, theatre, choir and instrumental performances about life in general, social questions posed by the pupils, their families and countries of origin. In this way Goethe's "Faust II" was made into a sprechgesang, the Afro-German musical theatre "Africa is on its Way" was created as was the musical "The Polski Blues" based on a novel by the Polish author Janosch. The elaborately staged performances take place open air or in a circus tent in the city centre of the district. The district of high-rise blocks on the outskirts of Bremen is home to about 10,000 people from 90 different countries. Intercultural life-style, large numbers of children, unemployment, poverty, initiatives and the commitment of 67 social institutions all shape the image of this colourfully mixed district.



The unusual relationship between comprehensive school, orchestra and district came about after the Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra of Bremen had found a new home for their rehearsals at the school in 2007. Since then, every year between 300 and 500 people from all social backgrounds work for months towards one common aim. They bridge social, cultural and religious barriers and experience how it is to change something for the better. In this way this project strengthens the self-confidence of all participants, those who live there and the entire shunned district, which is now the host for all people in Bremen interested in culture.

Proposed by Rosemarie Klesse and Hildegard Homann

Shreen Abdul Saroor, Sri Lanka



She is one of Sri Lanka's well-known women's rights activists and repeatedly risks her life in the struggle for peace, human rights and reconciliation. She is especially dedicated to campaigning for disadvantaged women.

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Courage and compassion

She has suffered the effects of war, death and displacement: as members of the Muslim minority, Shreen Abdul Saroor and her family were driven out of their home town Mannar in the north of Sri Lanka in 1990 by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. The predominantly Hindu Tamil separatists demanded an independent state in the north and in 1983 they began fighting against the government lead by the Sinhalese Buddhists. The Tamil Tigers' defeat in 2009 marked the end of the civil war, but to date the ethnic groups have still not reconciled.

In 1998 Shreen gave up a successful business career in order to put all her energy into campaigning for peace and understanding between the different ethnic groups. She is a passionate feminist – she studied Women's Studies as well as Business Administration – and therefore campaigns first and foremost for women threatened by social exclusion. She encourages them to fight against discrimination and domestic violence and to devote themselves to the reconciliation process. In 1999 Shreen and her colleagues founded the Mannar Women's Development Federation, which not only helps women in more than 100 villages to lead a more independent life and but also organizes the country's largest women-run microcredit programme.



As one of Sri Lanka's prominent women's rights and peace activists, Shreen works in the conflict affected areas and is consequently exposed to great danger as the state still pursues and punishes dissidents. Both her empathy and experience as a member of a persecuted minority provide the permanent source of courage which she needs in her campaign for victims of (state) violence, for equality, reconciliation and respect of human rights – not only in her grass roots and lobby work, but also through her political and academic publications.

She has the power to bring people together. Her good contacts to national and international organizations have made Shreen an important integration symbol for human rights and the democratic movement in Sri Lanka. In spite of her extensive lobby work and networking, the people at the grass-roots level are especially important to Shreen. They are at the heart of her work and the real reason for her courageous commitment.

Proposed by medico international and the human rights team of the "Diakonisches Werk"

Examples of Peace Work



Germany

Pupils Help Life



The German society “Pupils Help Life” motivates young people to participate in a project to support their peers in South-East Europe. Many of them actually work on the specially designated National Day of Social Work and in this way support youth projects on the Balkans.

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Youth support for the Balkans

They exchange for one day at school for one day at work and donate their earnings to an aid project on the Balkans: over 100 000 pupils meanwhile take part in the National Day of Social Work called into life by the society “Pupils Help Life” in the 90s. Since then it has raised 20 million Euros.

The young people themselves decide on how this money should be spent. Every year around 250 youths from Germany and South-East Europe meet to exchange ideas and decide which project should receive support from the money raised on this day of action. For example, on the outskirts of Hermannstadt (Sibiu) in Rumania, an organic farm was established which provides vocational training for the Romanies and Sinti.

“Pupils Help Life” was founded in 1992 during the war in Yugoslavia. A German youth group wanted to help reduce the suffering of their peers and transport relief supplies to the Balkans. After the war, the organization rebuilt schools and nursery schools destroyed during the war. It also began to campaign for a peaceful way of dealing with one another between the people in Southeast Europe. Since it began, the initiative has supported over 130 projects mostly in the fields of youth work, education and reconciliation.



A fundamental principle is at the heart of every project conducted by “Pupils Help Life”: young Germans should be made aware of the importance of social commitment. And it works – because pupils and young adults are in charge of the organization. Furthermore, they stress the importance of sharing experiences, whether through activities in Germany or in camps on the Balkans. Today a great many pupils are actively involved in the society; they give public reports about their work, supervise information stands or support the Day of Social Work at their school.

This Day of Social Work has in the meantime crossed German boundaries and has also become socially acceptable on the Balkans. It is a good opportunity for the pupils in South-East Europe to become active themselves and not just rely on help from others.

Proposed by Katharina Rogge

Mouctar Bah

Despite hostility from other citizens, public authorities and the police, Mouctar Bah fought to clarify the circumstances of his friend's death; Oury Jalloh burnt to death in a police cell in Dessau. The man from Guinea has campaigned to date for the rights of Africans in Germany.

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An unusual show of civil courage

"Right-wing extremists have referred to us as apes and niggers and have attacked me personally", tells Mouctar Bah from Guinea. However, despite being threatened by the fascists and the NPD (National Democratic Party of Germany), in spite of repression from government officials and the police the citizen of Dessau has never allowed himself to be intimidated during his campaign against racism. It all began when his friend Oury Jalloh burnt to death in a police cell in Dessau. Mouctar and other blacks founded the Oury Jalloh initiative in order to clarify the circumstances of his friend's painful death. They fought for a court hearing which, two years after Jalloh's death, began with two policemen being charged and finished with their acquittal. However, it is still unclear to date how a man was supposed to have set himself on fire with his hands and feet tied.

Mouctar continued to fight for his dead friend – and lost his livelihood in the process. For years the father of three children ran an internet café in Dessau. When his campaign against racism became public, the regulatory authorities accused him of drug dealing, having a loud clientele and "great deficiencies of character". The police inspected his shop regularly but never found anything. All the same, Mouctar Bah had to give up his license to trade in 2006 and has lived since then from social benefits. "Some problems are the direct result of our activities", the courageous man says. "But it motivates us to continue to fight for justice".



Despite all threats and restrictions, Mouctar still campaigns for the rights of Africans living in Germany. "It hurts me to see how refugees have to live here. They spend ten to fifteen years in terrible institutions. They are not permitted to work and become mentally ill". Mouctar and other Africans have founded a workgroup to make their life a little easier. They encourage those affected to exercise their rights and fight against the racism they experience on a daily basis.

Mouctar wants his children to benefit from his civil courage. "I would like them to understand that Germany is a country where many different cultures can live side by side. The most important thing is respect, no matter where you come from".

Proposed by the Georg-Elser-Initiative in Bremen

Centre for Comparative Theology and Cultural Sciences



The Centre for Comparative Theology and Cultural Sciences in Paderborn is the first of its kind in Germany and offers students the chance to study the major world religions “from the inside” and develop an understanding of the dialogue between different religions.

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Looking beyond one’s own religious horizon

The Centre for Comparative Theology and Cultural Sciences in Paderborn aims to unite the teachings of all religions. The students learn about all the major world religions “from the inside” and are therefore able to develop their own defined position after considering a variety of religious perspectives. The dialogue between different religions enables them to respect other religious persuasions, to discover similarities and to take a critical look at the differences between religions. Such a course on comparative theology is so far unique within Germany because at university one particular confession is always taught – usually Protestant or Catholic. Other courses comparative Religious Studies do not deal with different theologies “from the inside” but rather from a scientific observer perspective.

Klaus von Stosch initiated the Paderborn Centre in 2009. The professor for Catholic theology wanted to teach his students interfaith competence because an understanding of other confessions and cultures can “contribute positively to the integration of religious and multi-cultural minorities living here”, according to Klaus von Stosch. The ability to look beyond one’s own religious horizon helps to overcome prejudice and solve religious conflicts peacefully. In this way people of other faiths will not be discriminated or radicalized.



Institutes for Islamic, Jewish, Hindu and Buddhist theology and religious sciences are planned for the near future at the Centre for Comparative Theology and Cultural Sciences. At the moment the centre offers the bachelor degree programme “Theology of Religions”. Theologians from all the major world religions have already started working on the common aim of interfaith communication.

Proposed by Anja Dirkes



Europe

Ereblir Kadriu

Ereblir Kadriu from Kosovo has one main aim: to build bridges of reconciliation between young people. The educationalist organizes annual conferences for young people interested in social issues to break down the barriers between Serbs and Albanians.

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Reconciliation through education

Reconciliation between the Balkan peoples is close to his heart and therefore his greatest wish is to bring together young people. Ereblir Kadriu from Kosovo invests his entire personal and professional energy in encouraging young people to become involved in social projects. The educationalist wants to contribute to peace in Kosovo as his home country is marked by ethnic tension: the Serbian minority lives separately from the Albanian majority. This proves to be one of the greatest obstacles preventing peace and development in the area.

Before returning to Kosovo in 2004 to help build up his country, Ereblir Kadriu studied psychology, sociology and anthropology in the USA. Today he is valued as one of the most creative thinkers within the Kosovo education system and teaches at several educational institutions, including the University of Pristina.

One of Ereblir's most successful projects is his conference on social issues. For the last seven years, young Serbs and Albanians have met regularly for several days to explore and discuss socially relevant questions. They learn to resolve social problems and deal with the viewpoints of other Balkan students who belong to different ethnic groups. The opportunity to work together and meet informally in this way helps to reduce ethnic tension. The conference enabled young Serbs and Albanians to form long-lasting friendships. Moreover, non-profit making organizations and government representatives jointly founded new shared initiatives for young people.



In 2010 Ereblir Kadriu created the Organization *International Progressive Education* in order to pursue the conference's basic concept and combine education with international understanding. Amongst other things it is working on setting up a summer school to offer a greater number of young people the chance to campaign for peace and social justice in Kosovo.

Proposed by Erwin Selimos

Andrey Yurov

The Russian Andrey Yurov dedicated his life to human rights even as a student. Today he supervises the observance of human rights during international monitoring missions and teaches young people civil-social commitment in his workshops and training sessions.

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Human rights education

He has inspired hundreds of young people to campaign for human rights – through his own example and his educational programmes. The Russian Andrey Yurov has played an active role within the Human Rights Movement in his country since the end of the 80's. As a student he published forbidden texts and lyrics about freedom and human rights. He assisted in founding independent trade unions and developed a teaching concept designed to sensitize young people to human rights issues. The philosopher decided against a career as a scientist in favour of his political commitment.

Andrey Yurov is one of the co-founders of the International Human Rights Movement (YHRM). This international network of human rights defenders was established in 1998 and is today one of the largest political youth movements in East Europe. More than 300 civil-social groups from 35 different countries support each other's work; they campaign for human rights and fight against intolerance and racism. Andrey Yurov is the honorary chairman of the YHRM and in co-operation with the organization carries out international monitoring missions. In Georgia, for example, he has established a public dialogue between Georgia and Russia thus helping to strengthen the ties between both peoples.

In reaction to the restrictions on civil rights in East Europe, in the year 2000 Andrey Yurov founded a "School for Social Creativity" together with colleagues from the YHRM. More than 1500 young people from Russia, the Ukraine, Belarus and other countries developed ideas and policies for civil-social commitment. They founded regional non-government organizations which continued to exist even after the school was closed down in 2005.

As well as his work as director of the "Moscow Helsinki Group", an organization which supervises the observance of human rights, Andry Yurov also runs the International School for Human Rights and Democracy in Russia, where he teaches young people political involvement.

Proposed by the International Human Rights Movement

Human Rights Centre Georgia



The Sorry Campaign run by the Centre for Human Rights in Georgia encourages peaceful dialogue between Georgians and Abkhazians via internet forums. Another important aim is to sensitize the general public to human rights issues.

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Virtual paths towards peace

“We say sorry – for every word which supported the war; for every bullet shot”. This is the message of the Sorry Campaign initiated by the Centre for Human Rights in Tbilisi in March 2007. The internet campaign appeals for peace and dialogue between Georgians and Abkhazians, according to the principle “everyone shares the responsibility for the war”. Influenced by President Gorbatschow’s Policy Reform, Abkhazia separated from Georgia in 1988 and declared itself a sovereign state in 1992. Since then, there have been repeated armed conflicts between both peoples.

“It is not easy to apologize or to accept an apology”, the Sorry Campaign states in its appeal. “We ought to forgive one another for the war in order to avoid a second”. The internet was a new way of advocating peace and encouraging Georgians and Abkhazians to reflect on the horrors of war. The initial reactions to the campaign were aggressive and hostile. Even the Georgian President said that the Georgians had nothing to apologize for. However, the appeal soon became an important subject within many forums and Georgians and Abkhazians used the opportunity to speak about their mutual conflict.



The Sorry Campaign is one of the most well-known activities run by the Centre for Human Rights in Tbilisi. Its staff support peaceful democratic processes and aim to sensitize the people of Georgia to the issue of human rights. They campaign for rule of law, division of powers and freedom of speech, defend victims of violence and document breaches of human rights. Its daily online-magazine raises public awareness on the human rights situation in Georgia. The centre is a member of many different international networks and has branches in several towns within the country.

Proposed by the Human Rights House in Tbilisi.

Yavuz Binbay

Yavuz Binbay's wish to give the children a future motivated him return to Diyarbakir in the Kurdish part of Turkey although the Kurd had been the victim of torture. There he founded the centre SOHRAM which also campaigns for the victims of violence.

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Unbreakable – despite severe torture

He was only fifteen when he was arrested and tortured: the Kurd Yavuz Binbay has been campaigning for democracy and human rights in the Kurdish part of Turkey for the last forty years. The geologist and engineer spent over seven years in prison and still bears the deep scars of torture. His own traumatic suffering was the reason for the courageous man to campaign for former co-prisoners who had also been the victims of torture. He survived the fourth murder attempt seriously injured. In Geneva he found asylum with his wife and two sons and established connections to many human rights organizations here.

However, the situation in his native country allowed him no peace of mind and so Yavuz Binbay returned to Diyarbakir in 1997 where he laid the foundations for his relief organization SOHRAM. It is the only centre of its kind in the area offering victims of torture and violence legal support and helping them to come to terms with their trauma. In peace workshops SOHRAM encourages intercultural dialogue and conveys principles such as non-violence and tolerance.



Violent conflicts between the Kurdistan Workers Party PKK and the Turkish army still take place in the Turkish native country of the Kurds even today. Many people fled from rural areas to the capital city of Diyarbakir in order to escape the fighting but sank into poverty because there was no work. The children suffer most of all. Many children do not go to school because their families have no money for school uniforms and teaching materials. Instead they work as street vendors and prostitutes. They often see their only chance as PKK soldiers. The fate of these young people was the prime motivation for Yavuz Binbay to return to the country which tried to break him. SOHRAM succeeds in integrating children from the slums into state schools. Many young people finish their training and find employment. In this way they have the opportunity to take their place in society again and lead a life in human dignity.

Proposed by the Swiss organization "Reintegration instead of Asylum"



Middle East

Sami Rasouli and the Iraqi and American Reconciliation Project



Sami Rasouli's aim is to change enemies into friends and fear into peace. He therefore founded two organizations in the USA and Iraq that positively shape the relationship between the two peoples through the exchange of culture, letter friendships and personal encounter.

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Two worlds, one voice

"I couldn't forget the pictures I had seen. I had to return and help rebuild my country", says Sami Rasouli. When he left Iraq for the USA in 1975 at the age of 24, he could not know that he would not come back until 2003. This was the year his mother died and the Third Gulf War began. Sami Rasouli was devastated by the destruction he saw there. A year later he therefore left his sons in the USA and returned to Iraq. Here he founded the Muslim Peacemaker Teams modelled on the Christian Peacemaker Teams: qualified peace makers support those suffering from the consequences of violence, war, occupation and hunger. They represent neither a political nor religious agenda.

The peace teams led by Sami Rasouli work in close cooperation with local communities. They organize anti-violence training sessions for young people, strengthen the position of women and support health projects. The project "Water for Peace" made clean drinking water available to thousands of pupils. It also initiates letter friendships between Americans and Iraqis and enables Iraqi artists to exhibit in the USA.



Sami Rasouli also founded an Iraqi-American reconciliation project based in the USA to improve the relationship between both countries. It is closely linked to the Muslim Peacemaker Teams and encouraged many Americans to invest in the project "Water for Peace". Based in Minneapolis, this project supports letter friendships, exchange programmes and innovative Iraqi art.

In 2009 Minneapolis and Najaf officially became twin towns, thanks to the commitment of Sami Rasouli and his colleagues. A large number of artists and government representatives from both sides have since then discussed the war, overcome stereotypes and found new ways of shaping the relationship between their countries.

Proposed by Nathan Fisher and Luke Wilcox

Abdelsalam Najjar

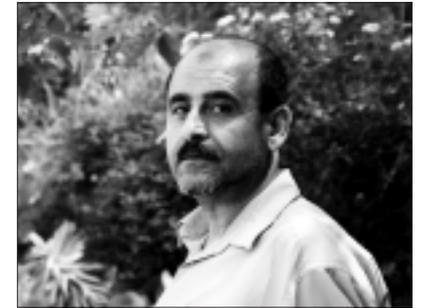
For decades the Israeli Muslim Abdelsalam Najjar has dedicated his life to reconciling Jews and Arabs. He plays an active role in the Village of Peace called Neve Shalom/Wahat al Salam and settles disputes between conflicting parties, both in his native country and beyond its borders.

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Tireless commitment to reconciliation

Abdelsalam Najjar's work can be described as a life spent promoting dialogue between Arabs and Jews and of ceaseless commitment to the Village of Peace Neve Shalom/Wahat al Salam. The Muslim Israeli lives with his wife and four children in the Jewish-Palestinian village he helped to found at the end of the 1970's.

During his agricultural studies in the mid 1970's Abdelsalam Najjar established a dialogue group between Arabic and Jewish students. From 1982 until 1986, he was in charge of the Arabic Department for Arabic at the International Culture Centre for Youth in Jerusalem, where he taught young people mutual understanding and respect for other cultures. At the same time in Neve Shalom/Wahat al Salam he founded the first bilingual and bi-national primary school in Israel. He was a teacher and head teacher there and ensured that Palestinian and Jewish pupils were taught together for the first time.



Today 60 families live in Neve Shalom/Wahat al Salam, which means "oasis of peace" in English. Abdelsalam Najjar was elected its town major several times. It is the only community in Israel which has made the conscious decision to live bi-nationally. He also helps to run the Pluralistic Spiritual Centre in the town. It serves as the centre for inter-religious dialogue in Israel and offers visitors the opportunity for encounter, study and reflection.

At the end of the 1990's Abdelsalam Najjar trained as a mediator and has since arbitrated conflicts, for example in the successor states of Yugoslavia. However, he is also called upon to help solve disputes in his native country. In October 2008 he mediated between Muslims and Jews after the provocations of an Arab on a Jewish holy day lead to violent conflicts in the north Israeli port Akko. Abdelsalam Najjar and a group of mediators and volunteers moderated discussions and meetings between the conflicting parties. This was a small but important step on the path to peace and normality.

Proposed by Hermann Sieben, "Friends of Neve Shalom/Wahat al Salam e.V."

Creativity for Peace



One of the most important tasks of the initiative Creativity for Peace is to train bearers of hope to take over leading positions within groups. Every summer the U.S. American organization runs peace camps for young women from Israel and Palestine where they take part in workshops teaching methods of reconciliation.

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Women campaigning for peace

There are very few initiatives which commit themselves to promoting young women in the Middle East. One of them is the U.S. American initiative Creativity for Peace which, also has offices in Israel and Palestine. Every summer it gives young Christian, Jewish and Muslim women and girls between 15 and 23 years of age the opportunity to spend three weeks together at a peace camp in New Jersey. At a safe distance from their native countries, the Palestinian and Israeli women can get to know one another. They live and work together, form friendships and learn to put trust in each other and in themselves. When they return to Israel, the West Bank or the Gaza Strip they continue to foster their friendships, share their fears and support each other. The members of staff working for Creativity for Peace locally help the young women to organize meetings.

After the camps, the organization offers many of the young women training programmes where they learn how to take over leading positions. Creativity for Peace helps them to advocate peace, work against prejudice and encourage understanding. The training includes two workshops both running over several days, during which the women learn rhetoric and group leadership. They work as junior advisors in summer camps and support the staff of Creativity for Peace by translating and organizing exchanges. Furthermore, they give lectures in Israel, Palestine and the USA. In doing so they take risks, as they speak in places where their message of peace may be unpopular; with the Israeli army or in Palestinian universities, for example.



Creativity for Peace awards bearers of hope who showing particular promise a scholarship to study. The young women become diplomats, politicians, lawyers or journalists and so continue their work as messengers of peace and reconciliation.

Proposed by Joa Dattilo and Jane Oakes

COMET - ME

The wind and solar plants installed by the Israeli-Palestinian initiative COMET-ME serve as a model for Palestine. They not only provide remote village communities in the West Bank regularly with electricity but also help to build trust between Jews and Arabs.

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A ray of hope in the West Bank

“It is a very special feeling to look out over the hills in the evening and see the lights go on”, Noam Dotan says. Before the Jewish physicist and his colleague Elad Orian thought of developing power sources for Palestinian villages, they advocated for years their protection and recognition. However, they wanted to support the villages on a long-term basis and so, together with other Israelis and Palestinian communities, they founded the initiative COMET-ME. Their aim was to overcome hostility through joint work and to strengthen the Palestinians both socially and economically. In 2007, they set up their first wind energy plant in Susya. The village is situated on the South Hebron Hills in the West Bank, one of the poorest regions in Palestine. Thousands of Palestinians live here in tents, caves and huts. The region is under Israeli occupation, many villages are repeatedly destroyed and most of the Palestinian communities do not officially exist, as they are not recognized by Israeli administration. Although the majority of households are without electricity the numerous Israeli settlements enjoy modern road, water and electricity networks.

After its success in Susya, COMET-ME 2009 started a large-scale project in several villages. The organization developed and installed tailor-made wind and solar plants in cooperation with the village community and students from the Palestinian Technical College in Hebron. Today, many Palestinian families in the South Hebron Hills have light, can listen to the radio and charge their mobile phones. Cold storage systems and milking machines provide them with extra income, as they can produce and store milk products. They can use electric pumps to access clean water from cisterns and wells and so avoid using contaminated sources.



The cooperation between Palestinians and Israelis has strengthened trust on both sides and given Palestinian villages self-confidence. The evening light symbolizes their courage to stay in their homeland and not allow themselves to be driven away.

Proposed by Klaus Körber

Center for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation



The Center for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation in Palestine organizes training sessions for teachers, religious leaders, police officers and women from rural areas. First and foremost the project encourages participants to reflect on their own role and accept responsibility for peace within their own environment.

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Begin by taking a look at yourself

How can we convey perspectives although there is very little hope? How do we deal with the dangers lurking everywhere? These are the kinds of questions discussed by teachers from the Palestinian areas during the training programmes run by the Center for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation.

300 schools in the West Bank have so far taken part in these training sessions designed to give teachers, head teachers and social workers the opportunity to reflect on their own role, deal with conflicts and break through old behavioural patterns. In a protected environment, they are able to discuss how the political situation puts a strain on the school system and how agonizing it is to teach in a violent setting. Many teachers find the energy they need to get through the school day through these joint discussions.

Other groups within the community also profit from the center's programmes – for example, women in rural villages. Every second Palestinian man ends up in Israeli captivity as it is part the code of honour to resist occupation. The center helps the women to cope with the psychological consequences of political conflict within their families.



Muslim religious leaders, Israeli and Palestinian journalists and the Palestinian Police Force have also taken part in peace projects. The Center always works according to the same principle: peace can only be achieved if the participants are prepared to reflect on their own behaviour and decide how they themselves can contribute to peace and conflict resolution and not just to concentrate on the opposing side. The center works preferably in refugee camps or rural areas. They aim to reach particularly those who have very little access to reconciliation projects.

All of the programmes look for alternatives to violence and emphasize the spoken word. Participants are therefore encouraged to express themselves, whether within the family, at school or in the mosque.

Proposed by Carole Becker



Asia

Shazia Parveen

Fighting against the bondage of women within the brick making industry is a matter close to Shazia Parveen's heart. The young Pakistani woman continually takes risks to help women escape inhuman working conditions and develop new perspectives.

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Relentless fight against slavery

Many people who meet Shazia Parveen say she is an exception to the rule. The Pakistani, who is a resident of the Sahiwal District in Punjab, has been fighting passionately for the rights of the almost 19,000 defenseless bonded labourers within her community for the past 12 years. The women live in illegal bondage on the grounds of the brick kilns and suffer physical violence, sexual exploitation, forced marriages and bitter poverty.

Many families work in the brick kilns to pay the debts which have accumulated over generations. They are often committed to the owners of the brick kilns who give them advance payments. They are not allowed to leave until they have repaid their debts.

Debt bondage has been forbidden in Pakistan since the 90's. Using legal means, Shazia Parveen has managed to free many labourers, including children, from the bonds of slavery. She has established informal schools for the children and founded education centres for the female workers. Shazia also co-founded a human rights organization which also campaigns for the rights of brick kiln workers.



Shazia launched a public campaign in order to strengthen the women's position. She campaigned with the government and consequently succeeded in acquiring both the right to vote and identity cards for the women. Shazia also helped them attain financial independence. Thanks to her commitment, many liberated women work in a private organization which provides micro loans. This money actually allows about 1500 former fellow sufferers to get loans in order to set up their own businesses.

To encourage solidarity between the women, Shazia and liberated workers founded several associations enabling the bonded kiln workers to deal with health and financial problems using their own money. However, Shazia's courageous commitment has personal consequences. The young woman has to date decided against starting a family and has sacrificed security and financial stability. But in spite of all hostility and murder threats from the brick kiln owners, Shazia continues to fight for the marginalized women in her community.

Proposed by Shafiq Butt

Nagarik Aawaz



The Nepalese organization Nagarik Aawaz aims to sensitize women and young people to the concept of democracy and to strengthen their commitment to peace. It focuses in particular on young people who fought for the Maoists and who are now searching for new perspectives.

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From insurgents to messengers of peace

The organization Nagarik Aawaz stands for forgiveness instead of revenge. The “Citizens’ Voice” shows the communes the importance of peace, justice, harmony and progress. Nagarik Aawaz was founded in 2001 at a point in time when the Maoists and the government were involved in violent conflicts. From the very beginning, the organization focused primarily on women and young people and provides them with the skills necessary for peace work.

The political conflict lasted for ten years and during this time many young people were driven out of their villages and misused by the Maoists as military lackeys. Today, these former communist rebels play an active part within the parliamentary democracy. However, a great number of these young people live in towns and are traumatized, have no source of income and are isolated from their families. In 2003, Nagarik Aawaz founded a voluntary programme for displaced youths designed to help them deal with their psychological trauma and at the same time to build a new existence. About 20 young people take part annually. They learn methods of conflict resolution and turn thoughts of revenge into a strong and lasting dedication to the path of peace. After they have completed the programme, Nagarik Aawaz awards the most engaged volunteers the title “Messengers of Peace”. They become involved in partner organizations and teach their peers democratic principles.



A further project encourages socially disadvantaged women and young people to become involved in democratic processes. In four districts particularly affected by political fighting, Nagarik Aawaz has established peace centres. These serve as contact points for the community and train young people in the skills of mediation, counseling and conflict resolution. Subsequently, the young people inspire their community to become involved in reconciliation and economic development. Many women also commit themselves to peace work within the communes.

Proposed by Tewa, Development Fund for women in Nepal

Dishani Jayaweera

In her Centre for Peace Education, the lawyer Dishani Jayaweera and her colleagues teach religious leaders and young people the skills necessary to bring peace to Sri Lanka's society.

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Encouraging bearers of hope

"I imagine a Sri Lanka where all ethnic and religious groups live happily together and accept that this country belongs to each one of us", Dishani Jayaweera says. The impulse for her commitment to peace resulted from the violent conflicts between Hindu Tamils and Buddhist Sinhalese, which began 1983 when she was 14 years old.

Nineteen years later in Colombo the lawyer and her husband founded a Centre for Peace Education and Reconciliation. Her aim is to create understanding and harmony between the peoples and religions. The centre trains religious leaders who have a great influence on the way that many people in Sri Lanka think. It also supports young people who Dishani and her colleagues hope will show a greater openness for a tolerant society.

The "Programme for Religious Leaders" unites Islam, Christian, Hindu and Buddhist spiritual directors. First of all, the religious groups meet separately to deal with the question of how to transform violent conflicts into peaceful discussions. Afterwards, they take part in an interreligious dialogue and finally visit one another and gain insights into the daily and religious lives of the people living in other regions of Sri Lanka. The common work in Dishani's centres gave rise to village councils in which religious leaders from different faiths strive towards peace and understanding between religions in over 20 villages.



The centre's second focal point is youth work. This is particularly important because most young people in Sri Lanka grow up and are educated separately within their own ethnic group. Dishani and her colleagues train the young people in ethnically mixed groups. They learn how to run peace projects, acquire leadership skills and develop methods of conflict transformation.

Dishani's great concern is to enable people to work independently. She still risks her own safety for this cause and hopes to see her dream come true one day.

Proposed by peace direct

Warriors for Peace



The Filipino organization Warriors for Peace teaches the martial art aikido to people involved in violent conflicts. This combination of sport and reflection encourages them to find peaceful methods of dealing with conflict situations.

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Martial arts on the path to peace

The Filipino aikido master Noel Fuentes is convinced that aikido makes a difference because martial arts help people to deal with conflicts constructively. For this reason Noel Fuentes and his organization Warriors for Peace link aikido to the message of peace.

The “Warriors for Peace” follow the teachings of Ueshiba Morihei. The Japanese man developed aikido between the First and Second World Wars and entitled his new way of fighting “the Art of Peace”. During his time as a soldier, Ueshiba Morihei had personally felt the consequences of destruction and consequently committed himself to helping people find peaceful ways of understanding one another. Through aikido, he wished to make positive use of the opponent’s energy and aimed to encourage mutual respect and open communication.

The Warriors for Peace run training programmes for communities in conflict areas, police officers, street children and rather unusual groups like soldiers, paramilitaries or rebel groups. “In the beginning we just train aikido”, Noel Fuentes explains, “but in the course of the programme we try to show the participants how necessary it is to find peaceful solutions to conflicts.” The courses teach the participants how to protect themselves from violence, how to intervene peacefully in conflicts and develop constructive solutions. In combining physical experience with reflection, the Warriors for Peace are able to communicate a non-violent viewpoint, which is consolidated through regular practice.



The organization repeatedly moves people to act non-violently. A two-year project, during which the Warriors for Peace retrained former rebels to become development aid workers and aikido trainers, was particularly successful.

The Warriors for Peace have a vision: a well-established training programme which allows them to accompany as many people as possible on their long journey towards peace.

Proposed by Christine Böckmann and Veronika Hüning

Swanchetan Society for Mental Health



The Swanchetan Society for Mental Health visits victims of violence in their home environment and helps them to come to terms with their trauma. The organization begins its work directly at the scene of terrorist attacks or natural disasters so that the extent of the psychological impact can be kept to a minimum.

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Healing within the framework of society

How should an orphaned girl find support after being raped? Or a woman hiding from family members after a forced marriage? Such questions prompted Indian psychologists to found the Swanchetan Society for Mental Health. The organization supports individuals who do not have the courage to look for help or who cannot afford such help. Swanchetan advises and accompanies sexually abused children and women, victims of human trafficking and ethnic violence and survivors of terrorist attacks, accidents and natural disasters.

Public institutions and other social organizations inform the psychologists about people who have suffered violence. Swanchetan supervises victims within their home environment and does not hesitate to return to the scene of the violent act. The idea that trauma should be dealt with within the framework of society is revolutionary as victims of violence often tend to withdraw socially. Rituals help the organization to give comfort and hope, for example by blessing a tree which shielded people from the bullets of a terrorist attack and in doing so saved their lives. Working so close to the victims often puts the staff of Swanchetan in great danger, for example, when they support survivors of human trafficking and ethnic violence. Many of them receive threats from perpetrators and put their own lives at risk.



Whenever possible, Swanchetan starts its therapeutic work directly when and where an incident occurs. This means that those affected deal with their traumatic experience immediately and do not seek revenge because of unresolved grief and so become perpetrators themselves.

The Swanchetan Society does even more for its clients; it researches the psyche of survivors and perpetrators, conducts awareness training both nationally and internationally, has contact to administration and offers trauma therapy for large numbers, who as a group, have to come to terms with a terrible incident, for example a massacre or a terrorist attack.

Proposed by Iris Petry



Africa

Anywar Ricky Richard

The human rights activist Anywar Ricky Richard has succeeded in turning tragedy into positive action. The former child soldier and his organization "Friends of Orphans" help traumatized young people to return to their place in society.

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Nightmare gives way to hope

"It is the greatest personal blessing that I was able to change from being a child soldier into someone who could help others in difficult situations. When I look at who I was and who I am today, I always feel a great sense of happiness", says Ricky Richard who was born in Northern of Uganda. The 14-year old Ricky Richard and his brother were kidnapped in front of his parents by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). For two and a half years he served as a child soldier in the hands of the rebels, until at last he was able to escape. "I saw unimaginable acts of brutality: war, rape, murder – and children who were forced to torture and kill one another", he reports.

His experiences as a young soldier motivated Ricky to found "Friends of Orphans". The organization rehabilitates former child soldiers and fights the spread of HIV/AIDS. It offers free training and provides funding for setting up new businesses. At the same time it also supports young mothers, who as girls became pregnant after being raped. The "Friends of Orphans" offer courses in live-stock farming and agriculture and donate animals to motivate traumatized young people to take up agricultural work. Games, music and sporting activities encourage the communities to campaign for reconciliation, peace and conflict management.



The organization is run by orphans and former child soldiers from the Pader District in Northern Uganda. It was here and in other areas of north Uganda between 1986 and 2007 that the people were subjected to one of the worst African conflicts: the war between the Lord's Resistance Army rebels and the Ugandan government. For years the population held out in refugee camps suffering the severest poverty to avoid the war's brutality. About 40,000 children were kidnapped, drilled as soldiers and forced into sexual slavery. The unbearable suffering of these young people makes reintegration into their home communities difficult, even today. Anywar Ricky Richard and his "Friends of Orphans" give the disturbed and traumatized young people the hope of a new life.

Proposed by Waya Mavin

Adeola Austin Oyinlade

As a presenter of the radio programme Unilag 103.1, the Nigerian law student Adeola Austin Oyinlade was able to draw his listeners' attention to his initiative "Know your Constitution". It informs individuals of their rights and offers legal advice free of charge.

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Taking the legal path to justice

"Know your Constitution" is the name of the initiative started by Adeola Austin Oyinlade from Nigeria. As a radio presenter for the programme Unilag 103.1, the law student from Lagos broadcasted "Know your Constitution" to millions of listeners in Nigeria's capital city. He aims to improve understanding of human rights and make the Nigerian Constitution accessible to the Nigerian population. Many people are unaware of the laws and are therefore unable to exercise their rights. They often end up in prison after unintentionally breaking the law, or take the law into their own hands, which usually leads to violence. Adeola invites experts as guests onto his radio programme in order to inform people of their rights. Even the public liaison officer from the Lagos State Police Force answered the listeners' questions. Adeola subsequently disclosed the telephone numbers of all the police headquarters in the Federal State of Lagos.

"Know your Constitution" works in cooperation with lawyers offering free consultations. Adeola also informs his listeners of this possibility in his programme. In this way, socially disadvantaged people have the opportunity to exercise their own rights. Today, a great number of Lagos' citizens own valid land titles, which they attained legally and not through murder or other forms of violence.

Adeola repeatedly writes dedicated reports about good governance, rule of law and democracy. His popularity as a presenter allows him to mediate disputes between the state and militant groups. He appealed to the government not to react to political unrest with violence and teaches the message of peace in schools. He urged his peers to become politically active and appealed to the media to follow the path of peace.

As a journalist and activist, Adeola repeatedly lobbies internationally for reconciliation and development. On account of his versatile and persistent dedication, the UNO awarded the Nigerian beacon of hope the title "Ambassador for Peace".

Proposed by Morenike B. Akomolafe



Amani Kibera

The Kenyan organization Amani Kibera commits itself to improving understanding between different tribes and religions living in Nairobi's Kibera slum, an area teeming with conflict. It attempts to promote peace through organizing campaigns, opportunities for young people to meet and football tournaments.

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A message of peace on a powder keg

Existential problems trouble most of the people living in the Kibera slum. They suffer from poverty, violence, lack of hygiene, poor accommodation and HIV/AIDS. The impoverished quarter of Kenya's capital city Nairobi comprises 500,000 thousand inhabitants and 13 densely populated main villages. The ethnic and religious tension is enormous and regularly gives rise to violent clashes. Youth unemployment is very high there and for this reason many young people have made the conflict between the tribes their task in life.

When violence erupted again before the parliamentary elections in October 2007, a group of young men and women spent weeks appealing for peace and set the foundation stone for Amani Kibera. They spoke of respect between the tribes and prompted artists and youth organizations to spread their message of peace. By the end of October the campaign, which lasted for weeks, had stirred 10,000 ambassadors of peace into action. They signed petitions and publicly appealed for non-violence.

Even today Amani Kibera plays a central role when it comes to peace and development in the Kibera slum. The organization arranges youth camps every year where young people live together and learn to resolve their differences. Amani Kibera also links the annual football tournament with peace activities.

In order to encourage the slum dwellers and especially the young people to read, Amani Kibera founded a public library. Children and adults of different origins intermingle here without any difficulty, and in doing so bring a tiny spark of hope into a violent environment.

Proposed by Benson Ooko from the Humanist Center of Kenya



Mohamed Mouloud Mohamed Fadel

Algeria's refugee camps belong to the most forgotten places in the world. Mohamed Mouloud Mohamed Fadel is committed to helping fellow country men and women who have been driven out of Western Sahara and now live in the camps. He particularly tries to give young people a perspective by organizing free-time activities, further training and opportunities to travel to peaceful areas of the world.

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Supporting the interests of a forgotten people

The Sahrawi Mohamed Mouloud Mohamed Fadel was born in Western Sahara in 1969, fled to Algeria at the age of seven and went to school in Libya. When he was 23, he returned to Algeria's refugee camps with the aim of helping his community there.

The situation in the Algerian refugee camps is more than difficult. Unemployment is high and the people have no hope of ever returning to Western Sahara, their home country. Morocco still claims the area formerly occupied by Spain and all attempts by the Sahrawi people to gain independence have so far failed. This situation is especially difficult for the young people to cope with. They have to witness how the natural resources of their home country are plundered by Morocco and international companies while their families depend on humanitarian aid. This leads to a high level of frustration.



Mohamed Mouloud Mohamed Fadel has organized a great number of activities which have given the young people in the refugee camps and Western Sahara a sense of hope. He was General Secretary of the Youth Union UJSARIO from 1999 until 2007 and founded several youth centres within the camps. He initiated courses in cooking, sewing, computer skills and dancing and organized music festivals, films and discussion forums. He established a youth newspaper and a library and organized sports activities. The wish to strengthen the bond between young people and the Sahrawi culture has always been a matter close to his heart.

Every summer for many years, Mohamed Mouloud Mohamed Fadel has given about 9000 children from the refugee camps and Western Sahara the opportunity to visit Europe. When deciding who may travel, he often takes many days of hardship into account in order to reach the children who also live in the more remote areas of Western Sahara. Mohamed decides on destinations and selects organizations to take care of the children, he obtains visas and sorts out transport to the airport. The huge effort is worth the cause because Mohamed knows that when the young people return, their world will have become more than simply war and the desert. They have got to know peace and have realized that they and their people have friends.

Proposed by Margot Keßler



**Americas
New Zealand
Oceania**

Asociación para el desarrollo sostenible "Semillas" (AsoSemillas)



Every year the Colombian organisation AsoSemillas offers a Festival of Cultures aimed at bringing the peoples of Latin America closer together. The association makes a large effort to support peasant farming communities throughout the whole country.

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United diversity, diverse support

The organisation AsoSemillas from Colombia aims to give human life dignity. It supports peasant farming communities throughout the whole country and is well-known for its festival "ABYA YALA", which unites the peoples of Latin America through painting, music, literature and theatre. Every year several hundred artists meet and devote themselves in particular to the art forms and customs of their ancestors. Their aim is to discover similarity in diversity, to overcome barriers and draw races and religions together. The festival organized by AsoSemillas also serves to preserve the ethnic diversity in the country, as over 132 recognized tribes live in Colombia.

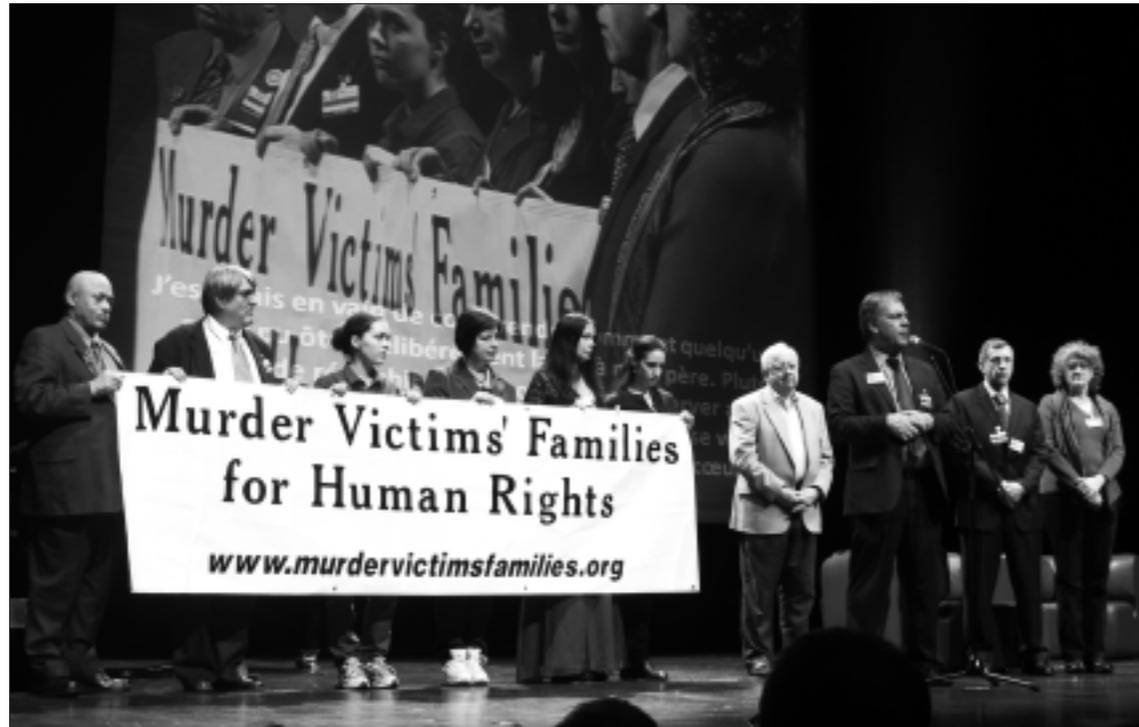
It is especially important to AsoSemillas to work on projects with the local community but in doing so the organisation takes great risks. For example, they help a remote commune in the department of Boyaca which still suffers today as a result of conflicts between the army and guerilla units. Staff from AsoSemillas helped to build two schools and a library as a way of improving the quality of life of the 120 families living in the Monquirá Mountains. They gave information about the consequences of slash and burn and provided the village with solar panels. They also showed the community how to make honey and supplement their daily diet by growing their own vegetables.



AsoSemillas considers it most important to encourage lasting respect for the natural environment. For this reason, in twelve regions of the country the organisation has established associations called "heirs of the planet". They attempt to raise environmental awareness and show the population how to use their resources economically. They explore the local flora and fauna with the children and establish nature reserves in the area around the villages. AsoSemillas also tries to spread education and culture: For the children living in rural areas the organisation designed artistic projects and local radio stations send music and educational messages into the most remote corners of Colombia.

Proposed by Juan Robinson Franco

Murder Victims' Families for Human Rights



The U.S. American organization Murder Victims' Families for Human Rights enables family members of murder victims, and of murderers who have been executed, to fight together for the abolition of the death penalty. Their exceptional commitment helps them come to terms with the loss of their loved ones.

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Forgiving the perpetrators

"I am passionate about abolishing the death penalty world-wide", says Jo Berry, whose father died in a terrorist attack. "Killing the perpetrators does not assist the healing of the victim. It simply creates more pain and violence". Jo Perry appeared at a venue against the death penalty together with Pat Magee, who planted the bomb which killed Jo's father. "Of course I felt great rage and pain when my father was killed, but I wanted to end the cycle of violence and revenge in me and transform it into action for peace", says Jo. "For me the benefits of putting a human face on the enemy have been profound".

Jo Berry is a member of Murder Victims' Families for Human Rights (MVFHR), a U.S. American organization consisting of murder victims' families and survivors of executed perpetrators. Together they advocate the abolition of capital punishment and denounce state execution as a breach of human rights. They campaign for violence prevention and support initiatives that care for the needs of grieving families when a murder has occurred.

The MVFHR was founded in 2004 and has since given the victims a voice via public presentations, exhibitions and publications. In several Asian countries they speak up against the ostracism of murder victim family members. The organization is also active in Europe and the Caribbean, where its members repeatedly rise above themselves.

Since 2008, the MVFHR has made an enormous effort to abolish the death penalty for individuals with mental illness. Family members of murder victims and perpetrators have gathered together on several occasions to campaign publically for this cause. In doing so, they also profit from the healing power their work has on their own grief. "I cannot describe the peace I felt sitting around that table", says a man whose brother was executed. "Everyone's pain was different, but I felt a bond with everyone that was like good medicine".

*Proposed by Arnold Alpert, Steven Dear, Delia Flores,
Jennifer Bishop Jenkins, Elizabeth Zitrin, David Kaczynski*



Codepink



“We love our families and can therefore understand the love of a mother living in Iraq”. The U.S. American organization Codepink is based on this principle. Most of its members are women campaigning against war and violence with a mixture of creativity, compassion and humour.

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A message of peace packed in a weird and wonderful way

“Yes we can can” is what the women from Codepink sang at President Obama’s inauguration and danced a French can-can. The U.S. American organization moves people to actively engage in peace work. The idea for Codepink was born from a deep desire felt by American women to stop the Bush regime invading Iraq. In November 2002, about 100 activists organized a four month vigil in front of the White House. The compassionate and consistent stance taken by the ambassadors of peace dressed in pink inspired people throughout the whole country to show solidarity. The vigil culminated in 100 000 members of the peace movement wearing pink and standing in a circle around the White House on the International Women’s Day.

The name “Codepink” refers to the security alert of the Bush regime, which gave coloured codes to the different levels of terrorist threats and in doing so, fueled public fears. Whereas the yellow, red and orange state warning signals are supposed to justify violence, the Codepink signal is a feisty appeal to fight for peace. In their pink outfits, the members of Codepink do not only organize demonstrations against the wars fought by the US government, but are also prevalent as permanent reminders of their cause in the halls of Congress.

Almost all of the organization’s activities are characterized by humour and imagination. For example, the activists hand out panties to politicians they consider to have poor leadership qualities. They also interrupted the readings by Condoleeza Rice and accused her of accelerating the war in Iraq.

Today, there are over 250 Codepink groups in the USA and abroad. They call upon the government to invest in health, education, the environment and other areas which say “yes” to life. The groups are predominantly made up of women and have built up networks with peace organizations in other countries. Wherever they are actively involved, the ambassadors of Codepink represent the motto: yes we can live in peace.

Proposed by Edith Rubinstein



Marylia Kelley



Since the 1980's, the U.S. American Marylia Kelley has stood up against the operators of the Livermore Lab, a nuclear weapons factory in her hometown Livermore. She has succeeded in convincing the general public and factory operators to work together for the benefit of man and the environment.

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Rallying against nuclear weapons

Marylia Kelley is from the United States of America and has been fighting for a world free from nuclear weapons for the last thirty years. In 1983, she and a group sharing the same conviction took up the fight against the so-called Livermore Lab, a nuclear weapons factory belonging to the U.S. American government in Marylia's Californian home town Livermore.

The laboratory researches and produces nuclear weapons, and up until the 1980's, it emitted unhindered radioactive material causing damage to man and nature. Marylia Kelley and her group of activists have confronted those responsible for the factory in a most unusual way: the Livermore Lab- in collaboration with the community- should repair the radioactive and toxic damage it has done. In this way, the nuclear weapon opponents managed to persuade the Livermore Lab to found communal work groups which, for example, took over the responsibility of cleaning polluted ground water.

Despite a slight improvement in the quality of life and an enforced change of consciousness on behalf of those responsible for the labs, Marylia and her organization Tri-Valley CAREs follow to date her primary objective: she would like to convince those in charge to discontinue producing nuclear weapons and turn the factory into social and environmentally friendly research institute of benefit to all.

Marylia has become a national symbol of integration for the environmental and nuclear disarmament movement. She is also taken seriously at a political level, as shown by an invitation to speak in front of the U.S. American Congress about the modernization of the Livermore Lab. Furthermore, she was co-initiator of a law which envisages a compensation programme for nuclear plant workers who have become ill. She was also one of the parties responsible in making the government remove large quantities of radioactive materials from the Livermore Lab.

Every year, Marylia organizes a demonstration with hundreds of supporters outside the gates of the nuclear weapons factory. In the course of the last centuries, she has proved to many people that action can lead to change, especially when they join forces.

Proposed by Gustavo A. Nystrom

Pauline Tangiora

Pauline Tangiora from New Zealand combines her ancestors' tribal knowledge with the message that we must protect and preserve our fragile planet. The Maori stands up for the rights of indigenous peoples world-wide and also represents her own tribe internationally.

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Preserving truth

From her bedroom, Pauline Tangiora sends out messages of peace to the entire world. Her car boot also serves the Maori as an office when she is on the road in New Zealand campaigning for a change in consciousness. Pauline belongs to the Rongomaiwahine tribe from the East Coast of the North Island Aotearoa and teaches people throughout the world about the ancient wisdom of indigenous peoples, for example, "the earth is my mother" or "if you destroy a mountain, then you destroy yourself".

The 71 year-old has spent an enormous amount of energy over the past 43 years campaigning for peace, justice, environmental protection and indigenous and women's rights. Wherever Pauline happens to be, she emphasizes the fragility of our planet and appeals to us all to play an active role in protecting humanity and the environment from destruction. As a tribal elder she takes a leading role when the Maori resolve important issues concerning, for example, land rights or a collective foreign policy. She successfully resolves conflicts and promotes peace both within her tribe and other communities.



The mother of nine, who has more than 50 grandchildren, does not only have close contact to the tribes in New Zealand but also to many other indigenous peoples world-wide. She has helped Aborigines to revive a long-lost ritual involving whales and has assisted South African Kalahari Bushmen in retaining their traditional places.

Pauline often works courageously and single-handedly. She is the only indigenous women ever to travel with a Peace Caravan through North America in order to draw attention to the problems in the South Pacific.

At national and international conferences she repeatedly emphasizes the holistic viewpoint taken by the Maori. She has represented New Zealand peace groups at the United Nations and other international forums. She worked as Regional Women's Representative for the World Council for Indigenous Peoples and the Earth Charta, is Ambassador of the Earth Council International and a member of the World Futures Council. Her wisdom, her power of integration and her way of viewing the world spread a message of hope for peace and nature conservation.

Proposed by Kathleen Gallagher

Lisa-Linda Natividad



The social worker Lisa-Linda Natividad from the island Guam in the West Pacific belongs to the Chamorro tribe and fights against the militarization of her home land by the USA. She campaigns for the rights of indigenous peoples and for an enduring democratic way of life.

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A show of courage against militarization

Lisa-Linda Natividad from Guam has one great aim: to create a long-term future perspective for the indigenous peoples enabling them to live like their ancestors. The island in the West Pacific is external territory of the United States of America and three quarters of it is occupied by US-American air force and navy bases. As a member of the Chamorro tribe, Lisa-Linda campaigns against militarization and advocates a respectful way of treating both people and nature. She denounces the impact of the occupying forces on the community where prostitution and breaches of human rights occur on a daily basis. The island's ecosystem has been out of balance since the Second World War. At that time much of the native bird population became extinct because the military forces introduced the brown tree snake which spread extensively due to a lack of natural enemies. With a great show of courage, Lisa-Linda turns against the policy of the USA for whom Guam guarantees military supremacy in the West Pacific. She campaigns for the introduction of a law against militarization by the United States of America and calls for democracy and civil rights.



With great passion, Lisa supports the interests of the indigenous peoples who have very few rights and who are driven away from the land of their ancestors. As a social worker she has founded several projects for social justice and spends a great deal of time informing the people on Guam about the political situation. She has a PhD, lectures at the university and has become a role-model for many young adults who also still follow their traditions today and advocate a nature-oriented way of living. They attempt to stand up for autonomy within a culture dominated by the USA.

In 2009, women from eleven countries took part in a conference coordinated by Lisa against militarization. Many of them were victims of military prostitution. The conference met with great resistance; the FBI was also opposed to it.

Lisa-Linda is aware of the risks she takes when protesting against the US-military, but she still continues with her work. Today she is also regarded internationally as an expert in the fight against militarization.

Proposed by Sue Gilbey, winner of the Bremen Peace Award 2009

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 works together 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 Price “Courageously Crossing Thresholds” in order to honour individuals and organisations which have made outstanding contributions towards peace, justice and the integrity of creation. Nominees are proposed by individuals and organisations 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 up to 30 selected individuals and organizations, which also show convincing commitment towards peace.