



# Center for Religious Tolerance

Religion as a Force for Peace

May 2007 CRT Bulletin

## *Has anyone Noticed? A Global Peace Movement is Emerging*

by Andrea Blanch, PhD

Futurist Paul Hawken recently sent a shock wave of self-recognition through the internet when he described the environmental and social justice movement currently emerging across the globe. He wrote what many of us have been feeling, but haven't dared to say – that something big is indeed afoot.

Hawken estimates there are between one and two million nonprofit and nongovernmental agencies working quietly on the most salient issues of our day – the environment, poverty, peace, social justice. Many of these organizations are small, loosely organized, focused on a specific issue, fiercely independent. But collectively, they add up to tens of millions of ordinary citizens taking action. Since I read Hawken's article, I've started to pay close attention. During my recent two month stay in the Holy Land, I was amazed by the number



and variety of religious and interfaith groups working for peace. There are groups that focus on peace through education, dialogue, social programs, the media, women. Some do grassroots organizing, others bring together religious or community leaders, others

sponsor huge public events. Some groups are local, others are national or international. Some have charters and boards of directors and by-laws, others are informal, coming together to meet a perceived need and moving on when the need is met. Together they are creating a profound shift in consciousness – the kind of shift that brought the Berlin wall down.

Increasingly, private enterprise and quasi-governmental organizations are also getting into the act. The United Nations is currently working on a "spiritual agenda for global peace," with a tri-partite focus on religion, economic justice and governmental action. Think tanks are studying the impact of partnering religious dialogue with economic development in establishing sustainable peace in Northern Ireland and elsewhere. Here in the United States, people are building interfaith coalitions to fight religious discrimination and support peace and social justice.

What these efforts share is deep faith and a basic belief that religion can be a powerful force for peace, *if* people are willing to focus on what they have in common rather than on their differences. There is tremendous power in people of different faiths joining together for a common cause. Seeing Jews and Muslims and Christians standing together for peace – or against religious intolerance – sends a powerful message. We at the *Center for Religious Tolerance* believe that the world is ready to hear this message.

### *CRT Highlights*

**CRT President Andrea Blanch** recently returned from 2 months of travel and study in the Holy Land, where she immersed herself in the region's culture, religious practices and peacemaking activities. Read her blog at [centerforreligioustolerance.org](http://centerforreligioustolerance.org).

The **Abrahamic Reunion's** March meeting, held in Shefar' Am, was hosted by **Elias Jabbour**, who emphasized that in peacemaking, restoring respect and dignity may be even more important than ensuring human rights.

In April, CRT members participated in the **Women's Interfaith Network** of the Middle East-North Africa Region in Petra, Jordan. Organized by **Elana Rozenman**, the group focused on women's empowerment across religious and national boundaries.

In February, CRT and New College of Florida co-sponsored a two-woman play about interfaith peacebuilding called *By the Well of Sarah and Hagar*, performed by **Ibtisam Mahameed**, a Palestinian Muslim, and **Dorit Bat Shalom**, an 8<sup>th</sup>-generation Israeli Jew.

*The Center for Religious Tolerance promotes peace and harmony through dialogue among the world's religions and through spiritually based interfaith activities.*

## ***Upcoming Peace Events:***

***5/25/2007 - Maya Angalu comes to St. Petes*** is an effort to develop new models of spiritual and religious leadership for women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Women in all parts of the world are playing an increasing role in shaping our future -

using both traditional and innovative models. This project explores and tests new ways for women to assume spiritual and religious leadership in promoting a peaceful and harmonious planet.

is a collection of programs for educating youth for a peaceful future. Curriculum development, teacher training and youth education programs provide opportunities for students to study and interact with students of other faiths. In the Holy Land,

Muslim and Jewish teachers find common ground in their scriptures and teach their students respect and love for each other's traditions.



Center for Religious Tolerance  
520 Ralph Street  
Sarasota, FL 34242

## ***Helpful Resources:***

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