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Citizens For Peace Minutes 12-11-07

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CITIZENS FOR PEACE
Minutes
December 11, 2007

The meeting opened at 7:00 pm with a welcome by President, Colleen Mills. She welcomed the many visitors and thanked the members for the beautiful stained glass window that was presented to her and George at last month's 4th Anniversary meeting. She said George has hung it in their living room window for all to see the lovely hummingbird and peace sign.

Colleen also thanked Secretary, Linda Lieder, for doing such a great job of chronicling our meetings and providing minutes to the members. She said that not only does Linda spread joy among the group, but everywhere she goes. Colleen then surprised Linda with a 50th birthday salute and likened it to a Jubilee which is religious celebration. It was Linda's idea for tonight's theme of recognizing world religions, and Colleen presented her with a card and plaque expressing the spiritual unity of nations which read: "There will be peace on earth when there is peace among the world religions" in several different languages. Afterward, a delicious cake was enjoyed by all.

Inner Peace Director, Caroline Trout, shared a selection describing several different world religions and their work for peace. She told us there is a great diversity of world religions, but they all believe in peace. She invited the group to attend the World Peace Service, at Unity of Livonia, on Dec. 31st, at 6:30 am. It is a very moving celebration with people all over the world joining in and meditating at 7:00 am. What a wonderful way to begin the New Year.

Special Presentation:

We were pleased to welcome Loretta Johnson, from the Michigan Peace Team, who was with us to discuss her experiences in the Middle East. She presented a slid show depicting several areas she visited during her two peace-keeping visits. She thought it appropriate to start with the city of Bethlehem – the city of Peace. She said the problem today, is that the wall being built by the Israeli's is being built well within the Palestinian areas, as a way to separate villages and capture more land. As a result, it is very hard for the Palestinian's to lead the life they once lead, getting their children educated, going to work, etc.

She showed us pictures of some of the checkpoints that have been set up by the Israeli's. Several peace teams are in the country, at various checkpoints, to ensure the Palestinian's are not harassed by the Israeli guards and their passage is not hindered. U.S. citizens can pass through without any problem, however Palestinians go through metal detectors and turnstiles. Their documents are inspected, they are fingerprinted and the prints are compared with a database in Germany. (It was interesting to note that the database was a gift from the U.S. government.) The checkpoint areas open at 6:00 am, and many are lined up at 2:00 am to be sure to get through in a timely manner. One picture of the wall in this area depicted graffiti which read: "God is too big for just one religion." Another depicted a poster which read, "No Silent Night in Bethlehem."

Loretta spoke of Palestinian Prisoner Day which recognizes the many Palestinians who have been imprisoned. One, in particular, Marwan Barghouti, was convicted for terrorist activities but many believe unjustly so. He was sentenced to two life term plus 40 years. His image is stenciled on the wall along with the saying "Patience Marwan" in 31 different languages.

In Bilin, weekly, non-violent demonstrations have occurred. Many Israelis who do not condone what's going on attend these demonstrations, too. Each weekly demonstration has a theme. One plan, while the Press was there, was for a Puerto Rican man to climb a tower and display the Palestinian flag. He was there for three hours and then deported. His effort was worth it to the Palestinian people, and many others, and will be long remembered.

Additional slides included depictions of:

- The many people who work to rebuild homes that have been demolished by the Israelis. People of all different religions have worked together to rebuild what is lost.
- A Medical Center was just completed, only to be demolished by the Israelis.
- Palestinian children are harassed by dangerous settlers, on the way to school. The settlers, in the southern region, are very nasty people.
- The Christian Peacemaker Team (Mennonites) has started a Peace force in which their young people serve three-year terms working in non-violent ways.
- The Jordan valley is very fertile and the Israelis covet this land. They have taken steps to evacuate Palestinians. Loretta witnessed home demolitions while there. The people she met in this area were very hospitable, offering coffee, tea, etc. Sheep and goats, for making cheese, are their livelihood. One family was being interviewed who had evacuation papers (in Hebrew) that they could not read.
- One man, Omar, faced with evacuation, decided not to leave. His family had been evacuated once before and he rebuilt his home. He intended to remain inside if they came to demolish his home. Israeli soldiers came by once and interviewed him. It is uncertain what happened after Loretta left.
- Augusta Victoria Hospital, of Lutheran affiliation, has been there for many years and does quite a lot of pro bono work. A Quaker group rents rooms there.
- The town of Masha has only one family that has stayed behind – all others were evacuated. The family members must cross the barbed wire fence and gate each day and must wait, at the whim of the Israeli soldiers, sometimes up to 2 hours, to return home. Their Israeli neighbors told of the settlers who terrorize and vandalize the family. The family has chosen to stay in their village and has painted a beautiful mural on the wall.
- Hebron used to be a thriving marketplace, but is now under Israeli control. The Israelis throw trash, even sewage, into the Palestinian areas, resulting in the Palestinians putting up sheets of burlap to minimize the effects.
- Loretta's hero, an 80 year old Quaker, John, is a very gentle man. He spends as much time there as possible.
- Many Palestinians can no longer drive their own vehicles to the areas in which they used to live. As a result of Israeli control, they now have to walk or take a cab.
- One area, with many wonderful olive trees was demolished because young boys were playing and hiding there. There was a massive effort, by both sides, to replant the trees. Israeli soldiers watched as the massive replanting effort ensued. The day after it was completed, the soldiers uprooted the trees.
- Young people were playing soccer, as a form of resistance, on a Palestinian road. Young Israeli soldiers watched and appeared to be sad that they could not join them.

Loretta stayed at the Palestinian Centre for Rapprochement between People. She was quite hopeful because there was a school there where people from both sides work together to ensure this education. She took a picture of a graduation ceremony and wondered: What will their future hold? She thanked all in attendance for having her speak tonight, and closed with a picture of the moon.

The members and guests applauded Loretta for her peace-keeping efforts and a question and answer period ensued. Many learned things they had not known due to the filtering of information in the U.S. media. Loretta mentioned there is a DVD called "Peace, Propaganda and the Promise Land" regarding the U.S. media spin.

Colleen thanked Loretta for joining us. She said she recently completed valuable training provided by the Michigan Peace Team. Their Dream is for: One million Americans actively involved in peace and justice organizations; an end to war and occupation everywhere; and a viable Department of Peace in this country.

Announcements:

- Colleen thanked Jodi and Rich Mosteller for inviting Loretta to be with us this evening.
- Colleen mentioned that Scott Ritter, author of “Waging Peace”, is coming to town on January 26th. He is a strong constitutionist and believes our government is wrong. She asked the membership if we could co-sponsor his visit by donating \$50.00 to this effort. The members approved.
- Linda Lieder had a newsletter from U of M, stating that the Dalai Lama will be visiting the University on April 20, 2008 to coincide with Earth Day weekend. He will offer a lecture on Sustainability. It is free and open to the public, though tickets are required. The last time the Dalai Lama visited U of M, in 1994, 9,000 people attended. Tickets will be available March 5th, with a limit of two tickets per person.
- Rosemary Doyle is looking for someone to help distribute bookmarks to area schools. Linda and Dottie Ochala volunteered.
- Pat Van Vuren announced that the Peace Speakers group is ready to get out and share the benefits of a Department of Peace and Nonviolence. Contact Pat if you know of an interested group.
- Colleen mentioned that Cathy Beal will travel to Arizona for the winter – we will miss her.
- Ann and Rick Abdoo are at the Lakota Reservation. Please pray for a safe travel back.
- Colleen mentioned she has been invited to speak at the University Women’s Panel on May 3rd.
- Colleen also mentioned that the DoP Regional Conference will be held in Chicago in 2008.
- Two new cities are on board supporting the DoP: Los Angelis, the nation’s 2nd largest city and Traverse City, Michigan! Refer to the national website, www.peacealliance.org to view the entire list.

Colleen wished for everyone a wonderful holiday and a Peaceful New Year. She hoped to see many at the World Peace Service on December 31st.

The meeting came to a close at 9:00 pm.