

Peacemakers Build Cultures of Peace

By Moe Qureshi

Peacemakers are the bedrock of civilization. When peacemakers vanish, so does trade, civil society, justice, progress, equality, trust in our fellow citizens—and strife takes its place. The future of civilization depends on the peacemakers. Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. practiced nonviolence for social change. George C. Marshall administered the Marshall Plan to rebuild war-torn Europe. Today, the fruits of their peacemaking has led to a vibrant India, an African-American President in the United States, and a European Union that is the largest economy in the world. Peacemakers take ideas of a better world and make them real.

Societies need many peacekeepers to contain conflicts, which can degenerate into a cycle of blame, recriminations, and misunderstandings that affect people far removed from the conflict. But societies also need peacemakers to build cultures of peace, which prevent the weed of conflict from sprouting and create conditions where people can cooperate. Peacemakers use their exceptional qualities of empathy, courage, and compassion to *transform* the lives of people in their community and beyond. Peacemakers can be teachers and parents, engineers and artists, world leaders and citizens.

Remarkable peacemakers live in my own community and teach me by their example. My drama teacher pursues social justice by encouraging us to empathize and walk in another's shoes before acting in plays. An eighteen-year-old friend of mine raises awareness about the consequences of peer pressure and bullying by showing how they caused his sister's death so others can avoid her fate. A Native elder I know helps former students heal after their experiences in residential schools. A local engineer volunteers to build schools in developing countries with the world's largest charity for children.

These wonderful Canadians, heroes to me and many others, embody the ideal qualities of a peacemaker. Peacemakers, being impartial and fair, facilitate a safe atmosphere to start dialogue *any* time and build trust *any* place—especially when the issue is unresolved and stalled without agreement. As broad thinkers they involve anyone else who ought to know and anyone else who can help. This way they not only gain the trust and respect of conflicting parties, but win the broadest support by inviting outsiders and giving everyone a stake in the outcome. This strengthens cooperation, challenges indifference, and engages others in building and rejuvenating a lasting peace, rather than simply preventing another conflict. They share their stories to empower others to become active citizens. Master Corporal Mark R. Isfeld showed he was willing to start anywhere when he gave out dolls. He engaged traumatized children, who may become future peacemakers, and continue his effort of building a culture of peace.

In the stormy seas of conflict where battleships of contempt stand ready to sail, peacemakers calm the waters by building an atmosphere of genuine compassion. The above Canadians show peacemaking is not just a legal role, like a police officer's or a judge's, but a social one. Peacemakers are the custodians of peace—and peacemaking is the domain of every citizen.