

Witnessing Peacebuilding in Action:

Karuna Center Supporters Trip to Nepal

October 26 – November 6, 2009



A group of supporters joined Karuna Center's Directors Paula Green and Olivia Dreier for 10 days of witnessing Nepal's remarkable nonviolent transition to democracy. Karuna Center has a long history in Nepal, beginning in the early 1990's. The group had the opportunity to experience Karuna Center's work in action by meeting with a variety of emerging leaders who have been participants in Karuna Center programs, including parliamentarians, the staff of government ministries engaged in the peace process, alumni of our peace leadership seminars, and community peace and development organizers. Our days were filled with rich discussions that were meaningful to all involved. Our Nepalese friends were very pleased to have the opportunity of speak of their groundbreaking work.

Here are some of the highlights from our American participants:

Talk about impact! Our meeting with over 20 graduates from the Karuna Center's training programs was a powerful answer to the question of how a few people can make any real difference in the world. All of the graduates are working to apply what they learned from the Karuna Center to build sustainable peace and equality in Nepal through both government and community NGO programs-ranging from helping women in rural mountain communities become self-supporting to making documentaries on building peace in Nepal. For me, it was the turning point of the trip in my full realization of what Karuna has accomplished

-Jonathan Hilton

While the newspapers reported Maoist threats to disrupt Kathmandu and close the airport, we were scheduled to meet with women parliamentarians who had attended leadership training workshops given by the Karuna Center. I was especially eager to meet the Maoist women who had crossed the threshold from armed conflict to leadership roles in government! The large turnout of these very busy women spoke loudly of their connection to the Karuna Center, of how they must value the work it had done with them. I am inspired still by the vision of these determined and remarkable women, working and struggling together to build an inclusive democracy, because they believe that that is the only way to sustain peace.

-Margaret White

Our afternoon at Stella's school was one of the most inspiring experiences for me. Here was a woman who, with no resources, started a school when she was in her 20's. Her work has evolved over the last 30 years into a powerful multi-pronged effort for nonviolence and justice, with a special focus on the education of girls and young women. She is someone who truly

embodies the higher teachings, and relays these teachings to the next generation in the most innovative and fun ways. Everywhere you turn there are teachings on non-violence: in the food

menu, in the murals on the walls, in the Girl's Peace Camp and in the lesson plans.

My heart rejoiced profoundly at the gentle, consistent means through which she teaches non-violence and models for these children how to walk in the world while maintaining a deep connection to their hearts.

Exquisite!

-Barbara Guth

After a week of meetings with the Nepalese people, we traveled to the lovely hill town of Dhulikhel, north east of Kathmandu. Led by our local guide and friend Mukti, we hiked up past a UNESCO protected Stupa and into the foothills of the Himalayas. The ancient paths took us through villages whose people quietly smiled "Namaste" as they fed their goats, washed their babies at the village well and began the harvest. The hardest among us made their way back to

the lodge on the top of a local bus, hanging on as the driver made the mountain curves, and feeling like teenagers! As the sun set, we met in the evening circle to share our impressions of our days in Kathmandu. It was an important time, and one, we know, that changed us all.

-Janet Nelson



Karuna Center supporters meet with the Prime Minister of Nepal.

For me the highlight of the trip was getting to see Paula Green in action. Paula facilitated the third annual session of "Cultivating Peace and Harmony in Lumbini," a meeting of multiple stakeholders from the birthplace of the Buddha.

A group of 40-- including nuns, monks, police, chamber of commerce members, cement factory owners, an archaeologist, district health officials, Maoist party members, ministries of agriculture, and academics—convened to mindfully discuss facilitating proper development and a peaceful environment in Lumbini. Aware of their differences in perspective, they are dedicated to nonviolently working through their conflicts in a compassionate manner appropriate to the birthplace of the Buddha. Such conversations, discernments, and joint actions are needed by communities throughout the world. Watching Karuna's work nourished my imagination of how they could be conducted.

-Mary Watkins