



Focus on Nepal: January-December, 2007

Nepal is a dramatically beautiful country replete with Himalayan Mountains, remote villages often inaccessible by road, flat plains spreading to the Indian border, a busy capital city of Kathmandu, and myriad ethnic groups steeped in ageless traditions. A kingdom for hundreds of years, Nepal is almost a republic, currently emerging from a ten-year civil war that pitted Maoists insurgents against government troops. It is a time of transition, as Nepal prepares for elections that will establish a constitutional assembly and a new government, and a moment of both promise and fragility.

Karuna Center has enjoyed a long relationship with Nepal, one that has been renewed in the past two years and will continue in 2008 with new programs that will reach both civil society and members of government ministries.

Our 2007 contributions began in January with Karuna Center director Dr. Paula Green delivering a keynote address at a conference organized by CECI, the Canadian Centre for International Studies and Cooperation. Dr. Green's keynote, entitled "Fostering the Ties that Bind: Practicing Peacebuilding and Development in Conflict Sensitive Environments," emphasized the corrosive effects of dehumanization, exclusion, and oppression within Nepal, and encouraged joint efforts by peacebuilding and development professionals to address these concerns through carefully structured initiatives. The keynote appeared in a book of conference proceedings published by CECI in English and Nepali, and is also available on the Karuna Center website.

Early in 2007, Karuna Center began a year-long partnership with the Institute for Conflict Resolution, Peace, and Development (ICPD), a Nepali organization focused, like Karuna Center, on education and training in peacebuilding. Our partnership resulted in a 2007 series of four seminars spread throughout the year, each four days long and attended by an on-going group of participants who constituted a mix of Nepali activists in human rights and development, government ministry personnel, educators, media, community leaders, and others engaged in social change and peace processes. Meeting in January, April, July, and December of 2007, the participants worked in teams between sessions on peacebuilding projects throughout the country, which they documented and presented at a culminating meeting for Nepali and international guests. Their projects focused on such initiatives as national media broadcasts to foster tolerance, cooperative programs for women from opposing sides of the conflict, human rights advocacy, education about the upcoming constitutional assembly, and training in community-based conflict management skills. Our participants, as well as our team of trainers from Nepal and the US, agreed that skills had been augmented, understanding deepened across divisions of ethnicity and gender, and commitments increased, making the four-part training seminars an inspiring experience and model for future work.



After ten years of armed conflict, we believe that the violence has deeply impacted all the residents of Nepal and that community reconciliation is essential for sustainable peace. Additionally, many Nepalese ethnic and regional groups, as well as women, have suffered from hundreds of years of social exclusion and marginalization, issues

that must be addressed in this period of transition to democracy. To engage with these issues, Karuna Center is developing a program for social healing in partnership with CECI, the Canadian organization mentioned above, to begin in 2008 and serve as a pilot model for community reconciliation. Based on regional needs, social healing interventions developed through this program may bring demobilized fighters from the Maoist and government sides together, focus on internally displaced persons, or resolve community conflicts.

Karuna Center has also developed connections with government ministers who have invited us to offer presentations on community reconciliation for ministry staff. Many members of government understand the need for such initiatives to heal historic rifts and respond to contemporary demands for social inclusion of women and minorities, and Karuna Center hopes to foster programmatic initiatives through these presentations. To promote social healing as a concept and practice, Karuna Center will also educate media personnel who can promote positive images of tolerance and mutual understanding throughout Nepal.

Finally, Karuna Center responded to one more request in Nepal in 2007: a conflict resolution process in Lumbini, the birthplace of the Buddha in southern Nepal, on the Indian border. This opportunity arose through the invitation of Venerable Vivekananda, a Buddhist monk and meditation teacher in Lumbini. In this historic



setting, all the Asian Buddhist countries and some European centers have built monasteries and facilities for spiritual seekers. Over recent decades, conflicts between the monastic communities, spiritual tourists, and extremely impoverished local populations have intensified, simmered, and sometimes exploded. Karuna Center met with many of the stakeholders in a four-day conflict resolution process that enabled participants to deepen their understanding of each other's needs and fears and to seek solutions that are mutually beneficial. We were glad to offer our services on behalf of Lumbini and pleased that the parties were able to come to a fuller appreciation of each other's concerns. We have been invited to continue this process, which we hope will be possible.

We are honored to be part of Nepal's process of change and committed to future programs that we hope will build more understanding, tolerance, social justice, and peace. It is our hope that Nepal can develop itself according to its own vision and share its majestic mountains and honored traditions with the world.

For more information about Karuna's work or to support this ongoing program, please contact:

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