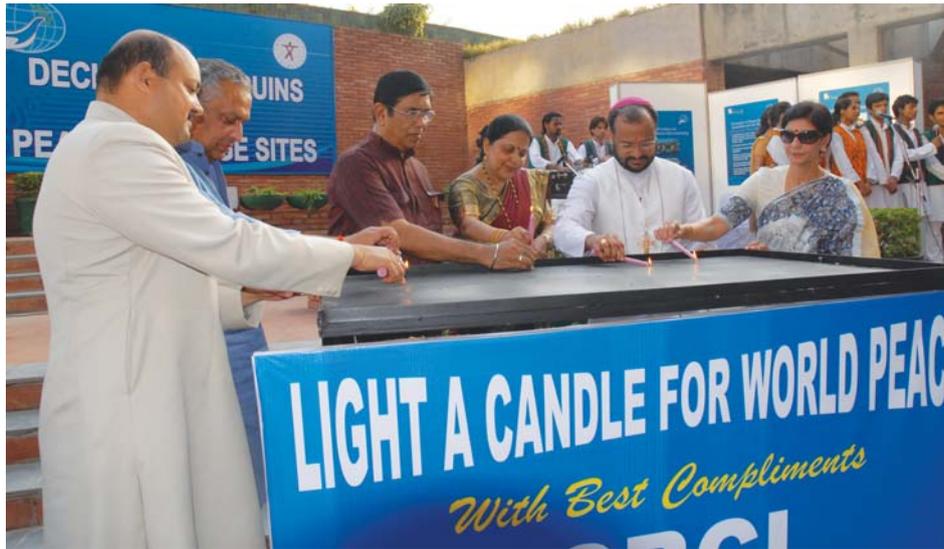


Light a candle!



A noble idea that also aims to promote peace tourism, the Garland of Peace has a huge and exciting potential.

TT BUREAU

MANY PEOPLE ALL over the world who have been introduced to the idea of the Garland of Peace strongly feel that this is an idea whose time has come. The idea has been conceived and developed by Sandeep Silas, a graduate from The Maxwell School of Citizenship & Public Affairs, Syracuse, New York. It gives a clarion call to "Declare War Ruins as Peace Heritage Sites". It also aims to bring about a paradigm shift in the world from 'war' towards 'peace' and lays stress on 'peace education', 'peace tourism' and 'strengthening of the peace-building process in the world'.

Silas conceived the idea on January 2, 2004, in an emotional train journey over the log bridge of River Kwai Noi in the Kanchanaburi province of Thailand, and later gave it a global shape on another train journey on March 20, 2004, over the Kalka-Shimla Hill Railway train in India.

The day chosen to dedicate the idea could not be more auspicious—World Peace Day on September 21, 2009. And the venue was also significant—the Plaza Steps of the India Habitat Centre (IHC), where ideas take shape.

The distinguished gathering included Oscar Fernandes, the former Union Minister of Labour and Employment; Raj Liberhan, Director, India Habitat Centre; Sudha Pillai, Secretary Planning Commission; Bishop Franco Mullakal, and Silas himself. All of them launched the concept by lighting candles for world peace.

Earlier, the 11 places shortlisted, to begin with, and the concept, were displayed in cathedral steps formation at the Plaza Steps of IHC for a few days for people to see and endorse their support. The trapezium at the venue displayed a masthead banner, proclaiming, "Garland of Peace", and below it, another called for "Declaring War Ruins As Peace Heritage Sites".

Introducing the idea, Silas said, "Garland of Peace hopes to become an instrument of



peace education for the new generation, an expression of peace tourism, and a framework for ensuring peace. Peace is the base on which any human development can take place. Peace is the foundation for realisation of dreams. Peace is life!"

Fernandes, who represented the political leaders of India, gave a powerful message, "I feel if you don't want to be going to pieces, you will have to don peace...otherwise, the world would go into pieces. Silas has given a brilliant idea that if you want to fight a war, go and see a war site before launching the war. You want to avoid the next war, you want to avoid Hiroshima-Nagasaki, you visit Hiroshima-Nagasaki, you visit Kalinga. This is the only remedy for us to prevent the world from going to pieces. It is the beginning of a thought process. Let us carry it forward. To save the world going to pieces, you have to don peace."

Liberhan, who represented the civil society, said, "It is a wonderful initiative that Silas has put together. Many of us are largely peace-oriented and do think about peace all the time, want peace, aspire for peace, but it takes a great deal of imagination and courage

to put an initiative like this in place. Howsoever a small step it may be, a collection of small steps always brings you to the point where the last step becomes a giant leap. And that's what this initiative expresses."

The seniormost bureaucrat in India, Sudha Pillai, who is also a Kennedy School alumnus and famous for her reform-orientation, expressed her hope, "I am happy to be here on this historic occasion. I have a feeling that we will remember this warm, bright, sunny evening and remember it for the fact that it started a trend and this trend actually caught up. The young have not seen war; we have. This idea requires a musical communication, and I hope there will be people who will actually pen down songs about it and then translate them and make them as popular."

Bishop Franco Mulakkal, who participated on behalf of the higher clergy, said, "Garland of Peace is really attractive because we are all used to the concept of 'forgive and forget'. It is taking another aspect of reality, that is 'Forgive, but don't forget'—don't forget so that such tragedies are not repeated. It is a great imagination and, indeed, a new dream. I congratulate Silas for taking the initiative for this peace movement."

ENDORSEMENT FROM INDIA

Dr Kapila Vatsayana, an authority on culture, told Silas in a conversation after watching the presentation: "You are attempting to change the memory of war, the human cognition. I am with you. Run to the Prime Minister and request him to take it to the UN. The moral prestige of India will reach the heights of Swami Vivekananda days."

India's Permanent Representative of India to the UNESCO, Bhaswati Mukherji, writes: "Very interesting and innovative, but its future is at UN".

GLOBAL SUPPORT

Many distinguished US experts on conflict-resolution and the higher echelons in the UN system have expressed hope in Garland of Peace.

*Prof. Catherine Bertini, former World Food Programme Executive Director for ten years, and Under Secretary-General in the UN considered the project very interesting and piloted it within the UN system.

*Emeritus Professor Louis Kreisberg, who established conflict-resolution as a discipline of study, says, "Your presentation of the concept is quite moving. There is something worth discussing and building upon. As you recognise, there is the concern that in many cases, these sites are still matters of contention and willful inattention. Often atrocities are hidden and denied by some governments and communities. Yet, overcoming that can be a step towards a greater degree of reconciliation and improved relations. This requires creative work by the people concerned, usefully with some external facilitation and consultation. Sites that are well recognised, often express a narrow focus. What is needed to turn a war site into a peace site?"

*UN Under Secretary-General Peter Piot writes that the "idea is very creative."

*Former UN Under Secretary-General Edward Mortimer and speech-writer to former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, writes, "Splendid peace heritage idea! As I said, I think an excellent symbol for this would be the restored triumphal arch in Munich with the beautifully laconic inscription:

AM SIEG VERWEIHT (TO VICTORY DEDICATED)

VOM KRIEG ZERSTOERT (BY WAR DESTROYED)

ZUM FRIEDEN MAHNEND (FOR PEACE A WARNING)."

*Professor Catherine Gerard, Co-Director of the Program on Analysis & Resolution of Conflicts in the Maxwell School of Citizenship & Public Affairs, Syracuse University, New York, said, "The Vietnam generation is out, the second world war generation is almost out. The time for this idea has now come."