

100 Projects for Peace – The *Salam* Initiative in Cairo

As a consequence of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Anti-American feelings are spreading in alarming degrees among certain populations in Egypt. Young people who do not find positive support and sustainable livelihood in their present economic and social situations are most susceptible to anti-American, anti-‘West’ propaganda. In this context the basis of Islam, which is *Salam*, or Peace, is being turned upside-down to produce a culture of violence and hatred. This is an issue of great public concern, and counter initiatives are much needed to combat the spreading sentiments. It is in this environment that this *Salam* project seeks to counter such notions, build a positive impression of America and the 'West', and spread a peaceful conception of the religion of Islam.

This project is a multi-faceted, self-sustaining initiative geared to the prospects of peace and cross-cultural cooperation. It is designed to counter the sentiments of hatred and violence that threaten peace in the greater human community.

This project exists specifically to forward three aims;

- 1) Educational aim: Create mentoring relationships across young people of different economic strata; create a visible campaign for the peaceful, tolerant, and non-violent interpretation of Islam;
- 2) Economic aim: Provide raw materials and training for a small independent income generating project for young people who are in need of basic income; provide an environment in which they may excel;
- 3) Societal: Share conflict engagement strategies that encourage cross-cultural, cross-national dialogue; work against hatred, spread tolerance, and propagate Islam as a religion of peace.

The *Salam* project seeks a clear and physical pro-peace message. Towards this end, the *Salam* project will produce and distribute P-SHIRTS, T-shirts with messages promoting peace, made entirely by promising young people in need of professional training and income. The *Salam* center, as envisioned, will select a group of youth via local advertising, teaching them how to assemble the P-SHIRTS, and how to design and create messages of peace for the P-Shirts. Participants in the project will be selected based on potential and need. Their commitment will be to furthering all the stated goals of the project during the project's duration and afterwards.

The *Salam* center is the location where the Pro Peace P-Shirts are made, as well as the location where the selected group organizes community-building pro-peace initiatives such as the “Islam Means Peace” children's home visits described below. Engaging the social consciousness of this group of youth in a positive way will undoubtedly make a lasting impression on their life choices and the skills they offer to the greater community. The shirts, with their trademark pro-peace messages, will be distributed complementary to children's centers and other selected locations of need. They will also be sold at the popular Egyptian bazaars and tourist locations.

Income from the sale of the T-shirts will be channeled back into the project. This income will allow for the production of more P-Shirts, and it will also be used to support other peace-geared initiatives on a local scale. The project has a self sufficient design, as I believe initiatives supporting peace must have both immediate and long-term perspectives. Investing in development is investing in peace; the project gives a unique opportunity to individuals who otherwise would likely not have access to a trade, but have the potential to realize success.

The "Islam Means Peace" children's home visits mentioned above have a two-fold purpose. Firstly, they are meant to engage the civic consciousness of the project's selected youth. As civic engagement is a vehicle for stability and peace, these visits will help connect youth with the young and orphan members of their local communities. Secondly, the "Islam Means Peace" visits are a community outreach initiative increasing the exposure of orphan and abandon children to the greater world beyond their center. These visits are possible due the large number of orphan child centers in Egypt and the receptivity of these locations to guests. The visits will be age-specific and include material about the United States, about appreciating diversity, and about the importance of treating all people with respect, even those people from different religious or cultural backgrounds.

Especially in this aspect of the project I am guided by experiences at the United World College and at the Shoah Foundation.

Through its presence, the project will positively impact the way the United States is viewed, and will help to spread the message that being Muslim means actively promoting peace, through tolerant world views, and through civic action. The project can be assessed by tracing the youth's civic engagement, and documenting their conceptions about the importance of international cooperation and recognizing Islam as a religion of peace. Using this material as a basis, the project's successes can be promoted on the web and in Egyptian and Arab press, thus spreading this project's important message. The P-Shirts can also be accompanied by an inspiring message in English and Arabic urging the buyers and wearers of P-Shirts to become engaged in initiatives for peace in their own communities. Information to be included with the P-Shirts will resemble the following example:

100% of the profits from the sale of this product go to support the Salam Project, a non-for-profit task force striving to meet the needs of Egypt's talented yet under-supported youth.

We thank you for your kind support, and urge you to spread our message of peace, tolerance, and non-violence to all peoples, no matter their race, religion, or nationality. Peace is possible, and it starts with you.

For more information on our project and for suggestions on how you can work for peace, please contact us at: (Project website and project email). Together we can build a better community for the generations of tomorrow.

This project has been made possible by a grant from the 100 Projects for Peace Fund, which currently sponsors 100 grassroots initiatives promoting peace around the world. For a complete listing of the projects supported by the 100 Projects for Peace Grant, please see...

The project is multi-faceted because promoting peace is multi-faceted. The project is innovative in that it creates *P-Shirts*, bill-boards for peace, sure to be worn frequently and treasured, especially by underprivileged Egyptian youth. It is creative in the design of the *P-Shirts*, and it is entrepreneurial in the *P-Shirt* distribution. To commemorate the initial grant, the physically measurable goal of the project will be to produce and distribute 10,000 *P-Shirts*, to commemorate the initial grant. To create the largest possible impact, the project is designed for sustainability, and following September 2007, the project will be maintained through local and long-distance management, and indeed this continuation and long-term perspective is part and parcel of the project's design.

I believe my background experiences will help to make this project a success. I've gained experience as International Partnerships intern at Steven Spielberg's Shoah Foundation that uses education to overcome racism and bigotry across the world. I've been a part of the research team at the Social Research Center of the American University of Cairo, where I worked on policy issues for meeting the needs of Egypt's booming work-aged population. I'm a Near Eastern Studies major at Princeton, with an understanding of the dynamic of Egypt and the greater region. I am in the Teacher Preparation program at Princeton being educated in the psychological needs and strategies for working with youth. After living in Egypt two years, and being part of a large Egyptian family, I am intimately familiar with Egyptian language and custom. I have a support network in Egypt to help me realize the project's full potential. I am a graduate of the UWC in Montezuma, where I received extensive conflict resolution training. I hope to mimic the training that I received at the United World College, translating it into a format appropriate to the project's youth in Egypt. I put my heart into my work, and I am determined to make this project succeed in its goals. Thank you for this wonderful opportunity.

Celene Lizzio,
Project Coordinator, Director
Princeton Class of 2008,
United World College Class of 2002