

## **New Ambassadors for Peace**

### **Background:**

In February 1996, the Maoist faction of the Nepal Communist party launched a violent underground movement to overthrow the monarchy and establish a 'People's Republic' in this small and mountainous nation. The insurgency grew bigger in the wake of the Royal Massacre of 2001 in which at least ten members of the royal family, including the king, the queen and the crown prince were killed. More than 13,000 Nepalese were killed during the course of this decade-long conflict. Since the beginning of the insurgency in 1996, Nepalese children were one of the worst victims. Hundreds of children were kidnapped and forced to join the Maoist guerillas as child soldiers, thousands were displaced from their homes along with their families, and many others joined the armed revolution as a result of the lack of opportunity for necessities like food and education.

Today, Nepal stands in a very critical crossroad as the Maoist Rebels enter mainstream politics and reach towards some historic power-sharing agreements and promulgation of a new interim constitution. Although the armed insurgency formally ended, the statelessness continues to result in widespread anarchy and thousands of affected Nepalese children remain under the dark shadow of an uncertain future.

The Maoist insurgency is as much of a social problem as it is political. It is interesting to note that the movement initially started from the mid-western region of the country, which is the least socio-economically developed region. What made this insurgency very complex is that most people joined the movement because they lacked better opportunities for education and jobs. Very little socio-political awareness in children and their families also exasperated the Maoist's movement.

While the nation waits for political deadlocks to be broken, none can rule out the possibility of another insurgency from the frustration being accumulated in children coming-of-age amid very few opportunities. We are, therefore, convinced that by instilling a sense of responsibility and exposing them to myriad opportunities through secondary education in some selected children who are directly affected by the insurgency, we can make new ambassadors for peace at the grassroots. For this purpose we have chosen Dailekh district in the mid-western region as the most ideal place to implement this project as it is one of the worst war-affected districts and is also accessible by road transport.

The summer of 2007 will be the most influential period in the history of modern Nepal as the national Constituent Assembly (CA) elections are held in June. These elections are expected to end the two-century old monarchy in Nepal, and more importantly, pave way for a peaceful and prosperous Nepal. Whatever the outcome, these will be some of the trickiest times to restore peace. The timing, therefore, could not have been better for an effective implementation of a grassroots-level peace project.

### **Contribution of the Project:**

Under the central theme of peace through education, the project will provide a full scholarship for secondary education to 18 war-affected children aged 13 to 16. The scholarship will cover the tuition fees, costs for two pairs of uniforms, and books and stationary. Two students will be selected from each of 9 units of Dailekh district, 400 km west of capital Katmandu. The ratio of the boys and girls will be equal to affirm gender equity. The students will be selected with assistance of Nationwide Scholarship Programs (NSP) - which is currently funding two students in Dailekh district- and the School Management Committee of Suryodaya Secondary School. I have previously worked as a coordinator of NSP for a different district for two years and the selection process has always been effective. A special emphasis will be given to the children with single parent (mother) as the general trend has been such that children who lost their fathers are very prone to taking up violence.

We will call for applications through the district coordinator of NSP when the project gets selected. Applications will be due the first week of May. The NSP coordinator and the School Management Committee will submit the list of selected students to us by the end of May when we

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arrive in Nepal. We will make a detailed schedule to orient and train the selected students to the curriculum with the help from the teachers of the School and the district coordinator of NSP. During the orientation from 15<sup>th</sup> June to 15<sup>th</sup> July, we will introduce the selected students to extra-curricular skills like working in groups, participating and organizing role-plays and creative competitions outside classrooms. Besides the regular course books, we will recommend literature books on peace as summer and winter readings for the selected students. We will select the most suitable literature and make them available for the students through the school library.

The orientation will mainly focus on educating the students about the sharp socio-economic and ethnic differences existing among Nepalese communities and encourage them to cooperate with each other beginning from very small issues like quarrels in the classrooms. Calling them 'new ambassadors for peace' is an attempt to make them feel responsible about the roles that they will have to shoulder in the future by making them aware of the challenges that they might face. We will have professional trainers and experts from UNICEF regional office to conduct workshops during the orientation. We will also assign the responsibilities for each selected 'peace ambassador' to organize at least two 'peace activities' a year. These activities will include creative writing, public speech and art competitions, games and small cultural shows. We will monitor the first round of these peace activities during the first month of the semester that begins on 15<sup>th</sup> July.

Although the project will continue beyond the summer of 2007, all the involved costs will be paid in first two months. We will make an arrangement to make an advanced payment of the fees to the school and set up an account for future purchases of books and uniforms. NSP coordinator and the School Management Committee will monitor the proper and timely use of the future funds.

### **Supporting works:**

A three-day long campaign program will provide general information about the project to the parents of the selected students with the help of *Ekal Ama Samuha* (Single Mother's Group), a local NGO working to uplift the status and awareness among single mothers in Nepal. This campaign will be scheduled within the orientation month of the students. The initial application will require parents to commit support to send their kids regularly to school. In case of any resistance or failure of the parents to meet their commitments, the NSP coordinator and the School Management Committee will determine whether to suspend the scholarship. Depending upon the availability of the fund, there will be new replacements in such cases.

### **Future potential of the project:**

Every 'ambassador for peace' who completes his/her schooling and contributes in spreading the message of the peace in his/her community in whatever way will be a major success for the project. According to UNICEF, the percentage of primary school entrants reaching middle school is ninety-seven. However, less than fifty percent of those successfully complete their schooling and not interrupt their studies. Another UNICEF finding also suggests that most young guerilla recruits are these dropouts. NSP will partner with the peace project and assume the responsibility of monitoring further progress of the selected 'Peace Ambassadors' after the summer's initial implementation. The results will be updated on their official website at <http://nsp.sebsonline.org>.

Having an established institution like NSP as a partner ensures that our project will endure while the involvement of *Ekal Mahila Samuha* will make the implementation of the project more effective; A cooperative family is the foremost need for a successful schooling of a child.

We are also glad to have E-kantipur.com supporting in promotion and publicity of our project. E-kantipur.com is the biggest news site of Nepal with more about 10,000 visitors per day. Upon the successful initial implementation of the project over this summer, we will present the outcome of the report to the Prime Minister of the country and the Chairman of the Maoists among others.