

*If we are devoted to the cause of humanity we will soon be crushed and brokenhearted. But if our motive is to love God, no ingratitude can hinder us from serving our fellow human beings"*

*Eleanor Roosevelt*

## **CITIZEN DIPLOMACY**

### **Peace Begins With US**

*The Mid East War is a daily reminder for us all that Peace DOES begin within each one of us and that there are no boundaries or borders between the souls of people. It is a reminder that there is no separation between Nations, States and People and that when one child suffers, children everywhere suffer. It is a reminder that the hunger that exists within the world is not just physical but spiritual hunger as well and that the sanctity and security of the world as we once knew it is painfully dissolving into the light of the New being born*

In the past years, the psychological interplay between the US and the USSR has led to growing tension within the World and the emergence of a new kind of Citizen, a Citizen who at a time when the leaders were not speaking decided that the people must speak, a citizen who had the courage to cross the borders of their personal, political and ideological beliefs to embrace the oneness of humanity. This Citizen is known as a Citizen Diplomat. Citizen Diplomats over the years have become a bridge between the "grassroots" and the bureaucracy. They span the gaps of separation between People and Nations.

### **Background**

Since 1984, the Center for Soviet-American International Dialogue has been establishing bi-lateral relations between Citizens of the US and USSR that have led to policy changes between our Governments. We have conducted over 40 conferences and specialized exchanges bringing more than 4,000 Americans to the USSR and hundreds of Soviets, in turn, to the U.S. Both Soviets and Americans found their lives transformed in the process.

Our purpose has been to create an atmosphere of love and acceptance in which people of multiple backgrounds and cultures can come together to explore their commonalities and differences with one another. Through this Dialogue process, participants are encouraged to reassess previously held concepts and beliefs and within an atmosphere of mutual understanding, are encouraged to seek positive joint solutions that can be implemented at the Citizen level

CSAID developed and sponsored THE FIRST SOVIET-AMERICAN CITIZEN'S SUMMIT, WASHINGTON, D C 1988. "A New Way of Thinking" AND SOVIET-AMERICAN-INTERNATIONAL CITIZENS SUMMIT II, MOSCOW 1990 "Restoring the Global Environment: Sustainable Development for the New Millennium" During these Summits, over 1200 Soviet and American citizens met in task forces for the development of ongoing joint projects in fields such as Ecology, Energy and Economics, Business and Trade, Human Rights, Education for a Positive Future, Wholistic Health and Healing, Global Security, Conflict Resolution, International Terrorism (finding solutions together), Media and the Arts, and Religion, Spirituality and New Thought principals

Over the years, these projects and human interactions have ignited a ripple affect leading to over an estimated one million people now interacting with the Soviet people as a result. This contact is most important for the people of the USSR at this critical juncture in their history The ongoing relationship established between our countries and our people is helping the Soviets in finding solutions to challenges now facing them in building new infrastructures within their society Through these contacts, hundreds of Soviets, are being brought to this country for special educational, health, business and management exchanges that will aid the people of their country during this time of transition

Our jointly staffed office in Moscow serve as a communication link between Soviets and Americans. These offices enable CSAID to play a pivotal role in assisting in the development and follow through of Joint Projects. Our office also serves as a "Citizens Embassy" in helping Soviet citizens and visiting foreigners with travel and visa support, homestays, seminars, lectures and specialized meetings both in the US and USSR

We have just opened an office in the Kiev in the Ukrainian Republic of the USSR. Its primary purpose is to work in areas of Medical and Wholistic Health as a liaison for citizens of the U S and other countries wishing to work with victims and refugees of Chernobyl. We are responding to the rapid changes now taking place within the USSR and the emerging independence within it's Republics

Today, in the Soviet Union, CSAID provides a vital and constructive voice for Citizens Dialogue that fosters productive US-USSR Radio programs and panel exchanges. These provocative dialogues are broadcast by local and National Radio stations throughout the Republics of the USSR. They are humanistic in their content and support the desire for autonomy and newly emerging rights of self-determination within it's Republic.

We have been told our work over these last several years has made a significant contribution to the Soviet people and the ending of the cold war. But for many of us it has not been about TRYING to create Peace or to change the outer world, it has simply (or not so simply) been the expression of our own inner evolutionary journey of learning to follow inner guidance, and letting lifes outer actions come from that "Peaceful" center within

As A citizen Diplomat, we are the Warriors of life. We step daily upon the battlefield of lifes polarities carrying only the weapons of compassion, understanding and Love. As we enter into the rings of the initiatory fires, our faith is strengthened as we absorb our fears in the light of Love taking the quantum leaps from the known to the unknown, in order to serve God through humanity

For many of us, our work has become our 'worship' not taking us outside of ourselves but enriching and deepening that spiritual center within ourselves. The success of the outer actions and it's impact upon the world are the bi-product of the inner movement of spirit and communion with God that grows daily within all of life actions and interactions

### **The Mideast Initiative**

Now as we enter the decade approaching the new Millennium, the advent of change is accelerating not only in our own country but throughout the world. As a result, CSAID is now being invited to

expand the success and "spirit" of it's work into areas of crisis within the Middle East.

For the last two years We have been invited by Ambassadors, official representatives and non-official citizens within Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Jordon and Israel to create the first Soviet-American-Arab-Israeli Dialogue as the only reasonable way to promote solutions of political, economic, humanitarian and ecological concerns which are presently overshadowed by present War crises

In May of 1990, we travelled to the Middle East on a fact finding mission to establish a third Citizens Summit that was to be a Soviet-American Citizen's Alliance for Peace in the Middle East. We gained support from Egyptian, Israeli and Palestinian citizens and officials. We had already established mutual networks in Lebanon, Syria and were offered sponsorship in countries of neutrality such as Cypress, Greece and the Government of Ethiopia. Our Vision was to build upon our foundations of Soviets and Americans working together and establish this as a model of the "New Relationship that can be adapted to dialogue with citizens and leaders throughout the Middle East.

We participated in Arab-Israeli Dialogue on the West Bank in Jerusalem in occupied territory in Palestinian homes with our Israeli friends. For some of the Israelis, it was the first time that they had direct contact with the enemy. Armed soldiers were stationed on the roof as we listened with our Israeli hosts to the stories of the Palestinians (Arabs) who shared with each other the pain suffered by both Israeli and Palestinian families due to the ongoing and yet unresolved conflict within the occupied territories.

Palestinians spoke about the loss and lack of self-respect and dignity that the occupation had cost them. They shared with us and with the Israelis present, that they felt that they were just on the verge of regaining their dignity and sense of self-respect. They said "Now we are ready to come to the negotiating table. We could not make peace with the Israelis before because we did not feel that we were their equals"

We marveled at the similarities in our experiences with Soviets and Americans. Stereotypes dissolved as both Israeli's and Palestinians (Arabs) found that they had the same hopes, fears,

dreams and desires to secure a hopeful future for their countries and for their children. It was almost identical to the experiences CSAID has had over the past seven years of taking American Citizens across the barbed wire borders of the Soviet Union (during the height of the "cold war" era) to meet "the enemy". When coming face to face with those we were taught to believe were the enemy, we found only the face of "the friend" and our shared commonalties.

Israeli and Palestinian (Arab) women who have lost children in the ongoing attacks on both sides asked, "Where does forgiveness start? Who will take the first step?" It was through Dialogue and the personal encounter that both were able to reassess previously held concepts and beliefs. They held each other in their arms as tears of past grief and future hope spilled over shoulders laden with the burdens of War.

The current situation in the Middle East does not entirely alter the regional conflicts that are presently overshadowed by the war. Even though at this time, we are not sure of the outcome, we do know that now more than ever Dialogue is critical.

### **ARAB-AMERICAN DIALOGUE**

We have just held our first meeting of Arab-American Dialogue in our Seattle Wa office with Arab-American representatives from , Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Jordon, the Soviet Union and the U.S. We feel that this first step of bringing together the Arab American community with Soviets and Americans working together for a common purpose can serve as an inspiring example of what is possible within the Middle East and within our own U.S. communities.

Our purposes for Arab-American Dialogue is (1) to bring together the differing Arab Nationalities for Peace and Healing (2) to create dialogue between Arabs and Americans as a way to avoid stereotypes and discrimination (3) to work together as Citizen Diplomatic teams bearing in mind that every individual is an Ambassador for his or her own country (4) to create dialogue between Soviets, Americans and Arabs as a prototype of "The New Relationship" now existing between former enemies and adapt that model within the U.S. and the Middle East.

In responding to the growing need for more experts on the Citizen Diplomatic negotiation process, both in and out of governments,

ones own inner journey The outer events are only the catalysts that bring to the surface that which we thought had long been resolved reinforcing concepts of the microcosm being a reflection of the macrocosm

It is time for Citizens everywhere to know that with every thought, word and action, they can and DO make a difference.

### **You Can Practice Citizen Diplomacy in your own life by:**

- 1) By applying principles of non-violence in thoughts and words by reducing critical evaluation of others.
- 2) Crossing borders within your own consciousness and your own lives to model the change you would like to see within the world
- 3) Becoming a beacon of patience, understanding and love to all those attempting to do the same
- 4) Honoring and celebrating one anothers differences as well as the similarities
- 5) Harmoniously aligning those differences in order to create and build together with others
- 6) By continually refining elements of non-judgement in order to hold "two points of views simultaneously
- 7) Developing an intuitive sense of timing of "knowing when to yield and when to be firm, when to speak out and when to be silent"
- 8) Realizing that you are the architect of your own destiny
- 9) Embracing the planet as the parent would embrace his or her own child
- 10) Holding the field of Unconditional love for ALL PEOPLE everywhere so TOGETHER we can recognize our common humanity.

**As we apply the elements of Citizen Diplomacy in our own life, we begin to reflect and model the change we would like to see within the world. In turn, what we experience**

through our International interactions can be equally applied to the people and leaders within our own Nation, our own community and equally important, to those within our own home

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**Rev. Max Lafser, M.A.** Psychology, Chairman of the Board, Center for Soviet American International Dialogue, co-coordinator of the Soviet-American Citizens' Summit in Moscow 1990, co-creator of Conflict Resolution Series within the Republics of the USSR, Middle East, Vietnam, Ireland, Costa Rica and Ethiopia. Rev Lafser acted as Liaison Officer for the International Association of Unity Churches, in the United States and has led Seminars and given lectures on Human Relations and the Art of Negotiations. He is currently developing Conflict Resolution Training Seminars and Non-Official Citizen Diplomacy Seminars through CSAID in the USSR and Internationally

**Rama Vernon**, Founder/President, Center for Soviet-American International Dialogue has a background in East-West Psychology, Asian Philosophy, and Comparative Religion. She has co-developed Conflict Resolution Roundtable Dialogues between the Armenians and Azerbaijanis and is now establishing "Non Official Dialogue Groups in Egypt, Israel, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon as well as with the Arab-American Community within the U.S. Ms. Vernon, a Lebanese American and mother of five children, originated the First Soviet-American Citizens' Summit I, Washington D.C. 1988 and Summit II in Moscow 1990. She has travelled to the Soviet Union 47 times in the development of numerous conferences and exchanges that have led to the development of over 700 joint projects between Soviet and American citizens.

**For more information on The Center for Soviet-American International Dialogue and how you can become involved, contact:**

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