

Peace Prize Nomination

Organisation's Name: City Montessori School
Organisation's Location: Lucknow, India
Organisation's Website: <http://www.cmseducation.org>

Description of specific project, practice, or technique

City Montessori School or CMS as it is popularly known, is listed in the Guinness Book as world's largest school by pupil with current enrolment of over 45,000 students. It is also world's first and only school to be honoured with the UNESCO Prize for Peace Education (in the year 2002).

In tandem with the UNESCO's Preamble, "Since war begins in the minds of men it is in the mind of man that the seeds of peace need to be planted.

CMS has an extensive peace education program that aims at implanting the seeds of peace in the minds of children at a young age. The efforts of CMS are not just limited to theory. In 1999, India and Pakistan fought a bloody war in Kashmir in which thousands were killed. Jingoistic passions were running high in both the countries. Alarmed at this sudden change in the behaviour of CMS students, the school waited for some time for passions to cool down and then at the end of 2001, asked it floated a Indo-Pak Children's Friendship Club called 'Aao Dosti Karein' (meaning 'Come Let's Be Friends').

This CMS peace initiative aims to facilitate direct person-to-person contact between children of India and Pakistan in the belief that it is only through such interaction that we can help remove misunderstandings and misgivings between the people of two countries. This letter exchange is like sowing the seeds of peace in the minds of children, which in time to come shall bloom and lead to a better future for children of both the countries.

To begin with, 3,000 CMS students wrote letters to Pakistani students asking them to be friends. Students of five Pakistani schools responded and the letter exchange program that began is still continuing. Over 20,000 letters have been exchanged under this program with most participants expressing a heartfelt desire for peace between the two antagonistic nuclear-armed nations. Incidentally, this letter exchange led to exchange visits between teams from India and Pakistan to participate in various events being organized across the border. Extracts from some of these letters can be read at <http://www.cms.education.org/aaodostikarein> A few of them are quoted below:

Deep down, in the hearts of every Pakistani, there is a feeling of love and gratitude for Indians, but it is only the meaningless issues that have kept the existent relationship between us. Indians are part of most Pakistani's everyday life, as most of us enjoy watching the Indian Dramas and Films. In fact, I personally like the Indian heroes – Sachin Tendulkar, Zaheer Khan and Amitabh, being my favourite ones. We have got to sit together and decide every issue very peacefully so that we can once again be what we were!

— Shabir Jafri, XI-C, Habib Public School, Karachi, Pakistan
replying to Ankit Kumar, XI-4 of CMS Mahanagar Branch

I never thought that our Indian friends will ever extend a hand of friendship with Pakistani children. I can assure you that this issue will surely lead to desirable consequences if we strive to pursue it wholeheartedly with a conviction that we will make an effort to resolve this issue earnestly.

— Shahrukh Tariq, XI-B, Habib Public School, Karachi, Pakistan
replying to Sonal Srivastava, XI-C of CMS Gomtinagar Branch

As a Pakistani student I was delighted when your letter was handed over to me. The idea of promoting peace through such an initiative is remarkable.

— Naweed Jessani, XI-C, Habib Public School, Karachi, Pakistan
replying to Neelam Mathur, XI-4 of CMS Mahanagar Branch

To be honest I am very impressed about this effort of the people on your side and I fully support this peace campaign as war surely leads only to destruction and hatred. I hope that this effort continues and our countries come to peaceful terms.

— Syed Ibad Hyder, XI, Habib Public School, Karachi, Pakistan
replying to Anushree Singh, XI-B of CMS Gontinagar Branch

This effort you have started is very good and I think both our countries need to shake hands and resolve hostilities. I think this effort should be continued and I'm hoping to receive more letters from you.

— Jawad Kamani, XI-A, Habib Public School, Karachi, Pakistan
replying to Rusha Chaudhuri, XI-4 of CMS Mahanagar Branch

Despite our individual likes and dislikes, we all belong to the sect of humanity. The hue of our blood speaks of our oneness & solidarity. The international boundaries made by man should not hamper the mental state equality and brotherhood that is the natural gift of God to man. The unethical postulates of religious fanaticism and immoral invocation should be checked from blemishing the lines of our unity. Let us discover our long lost oneness and establish a bond of friendship. It is high time we realize the intensity of the possible partition lest we choke ourselves to death & distress.

— Sana Aslam, XI, Karachi High School, Karachi, Pakistan
replying to Bhavesh Goel, XI of CMS Gomti Nagar Branch

It is high time we realize and also make our elders realize that a war is not the only solution to our problems. All my classmates also agree that love and unity should prevail among the residents of the two neighbouring countries.

— Yasir Nasir, XI-O, Karachi High School, Karachi, Pakistan
replying to Rohan Agarwal, XI-O of CMS Mahanagar Branch

In the case of peace and harmony in our countries I would like to say that I am extremely pleased that you took the first step to remove all sorts of hatred and misunderstanding between our countries.

— Umair Arif, XI-O, Karachi High School, Karachi, Pakistan
replying to Vishnu Kumar Katra, XI-A of CMS Station Road Branch

I received your letter and was excited as well as pleased to find out that we share similar thoughts.

— Usman Ghani, VIII Beaconhouse School System, Lahore, Pakistan
Replying to Kumar Utkarsh, VIII B, CMS, Indira Nagar Branch

Information on organisation or agency including history and scope of its work:

City Montessori School or CMS was established in 1959 in a rented premises and on a borrowed capital of US\$ 10 by a husband and wife team of two young and dedicated social workers committed to Gandhian ideals of non-violence and social transformation through education.

The founders, Jagdish and his wife Bharti Gandhi were committed to the ideal of world unity and therefore chose as the school motto the words 'Jai Jagat' (meaning hail the world) the clarion call of Saint Vinoba Bhave, Mahatma Gandhi's favourite disciple.

The school began with only five students on roll but the school's educational philosophy and approach led more and more parents to send their children to CMS and the school's student strength kept growing. Since 1999, CMS has been listed in the Guinness Book as world's largest school by pupil with the student strength growing every year.

CMS has an extensive program to inculcate globalism and world citizen citizenship in children. As part of this the school organizes 30 international events regularly most of them every year, some of them every second year. Thousands of children from all over India and across the world come

to participate in these events and are exposed to CMS philosophy of peace and co-existence. Besides CMS also sends hundreds of CMS students to participate in events in other countries thus giving them a chance to experience cross-cultural interaction.

There have been several instances where schools have gone back and organized similar events in their school thus promoting the CMS values and efforts. These schools are in countries like Pakistan, Australia, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh.

Another unique CMS contribution happened when CMS founder Jagdish Gandhi visited Japan in 1993 and learned about the concept of Quality Circles that are used in manufacturing and servicing industries to constantly improve quality. He came back to Lucknow and introduced the idea of Student Quality Control Circles (SQCC) in CMS. Thus was born world's first SQCC Jai Jagat that was hailed at the National Convention of Quality Control Circles (NCQCC) in December 1993.

NCQCC recommended that SQCC Jai Jagat present its case study 'How to excel in examinations' at the International Convention of Quality Control Circles to be held in Hong Kong in 1994. There too SQCC Jai Jagat won laurels and was awarded 'Outstanding Case Study'. The SQCC movement took deep roots and swiftly spread to many countries. Today a World Council for Total Quality and Excellence in Education (WCTQEE) has been established with chapters in more than two dozen countries. Many internationally known Quality Gurus like Don Dewar, Dallas Blakenship, Richard Ennals, Andre Lim, David Hutchins etc. adorn the Board of Directors of WCTQEE.

Describe the context in which the organisation works, analyse the conflict, and indicate how this analysis has influenced the peacebuilding work of the organisation:

CMS was founded as an experiment in social transformation through education. Based in Lucknow, a city in northern India with roughly equal number of Hindus and Muslims, the area has been notorious for sectarian violence.

At CMS, every school day begins with an all religion prayer in which all children participate i.e. children of one religion also render prayers in the mode of other religions. This inculcates tolerance and respect for other religions in them. Over a fifty-year period this has resulted in a sea change in the attitude of people so much so that ever since the establishment of CMS there has been not a single case of Hindu-Muslim violence in Lucknow. Stories of social impact of CMS have been published in numerous international and national publications and can be read at http://cmseducation.org/cmseduimpact/int_acc.htm

In order to generate awareness for peace, tolerance and coexistence, CMS staff and students regularly take out peace marches particularly at times when religious or sectarian situation becomes tense. Sometimes even the district administration has approached the school for help to clam down tense situation by taking out peace marches. This reflects the effectiveness and sincerity of the school's approach to not only preaching peace but practicing it as well.

The CMS approach is to work for world unity since the fruit of world peace can only grow on the tree of world unity. The basis of world unity are the over two billion children of the world who are the common denominator for all the countries of the world and whose future can no longer be ignored by any country. They have become progressively threatened due to global warming and climate change, international terrorism and the ever-present threat of a nuclear war. Through education, CMS is trying to change the mind-set of children, parents and the society at large.

In order to sensitize the people at large about the CMS philosophy, among other things, every year CMS takes out a tableau in the annual Republic Day parade at Lucknow. The theme of every CMS tableau is the CMS philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutambakam i.e. 'The world is but one country and mankind its citizens'. Over the years, 30 out of 35 times, CMS tableau has won the first prize for its thematic content and aesthetic presentation.

The peacebuilding efforts of CMS happen at local and international levels. At the local level awareness for peace is raised through peace marches, various competitions for children and the CMS tableau at the annual Republic Day Parade. At the international level, it takes place through the 32 international events that organizes regularly, including the annual International Conference of Chief Justices of the World that has been organized since 2002 with the aim of building global public opinion in favour of world peace and world unity. Over the years a total of 484 Chief Justices and Judges from 484 countries have attended this event and have endorsed the CMS agenda of world unity and world peace.

A highlight of the Chief Justices' Conference is the 'Children's Appeal to World Judiciary' to safeguard their future from the threat of global warming and climate change, eco-disasters and the ever present threat of nuclear war. At the conference there are several sessions where participating Chief Justices and Judges interact with the students.

Impact of the organisation or agency's work, including credible policy and advocacy influence that contributes toward peace:

CMS began in 1959 with only five students on roll but today has over 45,000 students. The school organizes 30 international events regularly all of which aim to promote awareness of world unity and world peace. Over the years, more than fifty thousand participants have attended these events, a tenth of them foreigners. All of them imbibed CMS message of world unity and world peace and many of the participating schools started similar peace-based-events in their country.

Amongst the many peace initiatives of CMS are the Indo-Pak Friendship Club, the International Conference of Chief Justices of the World, the peace petition to the then UN Secretary General Kofi Annan on which CMS students collected nearly 100,000 signatures, frequent peace marches and numerous peace based painting and poem competitions etc.

Tell us a story about this organisation or agency's peace work:

The most famous story related to the peace activity of CMS happened in early 1990s. At Ayodhya, an ancient temple town about 100 kilometres from Lucknow, there was an old structure that was claimed by Hindus to be a temple while the Muslims claimed it was a mosque. A legal battle had been going on the issue for decades till in October 1990, an extremist Hindu mob forcibly pulled down the structure, violence between Hindus and Muslims broke out all over northern India. Since Lucknow had roughly 60-40% of Hindu and Muslim population - and most of the local police force had been sent to Ayodhya to control the situation there, a panicky local administration approached CMS management who agreed to help out. CMS staff and students took out peace marches throughout the city and a Jeep leading the procession on which appeals to maintain peace were being broadcast and songs of religious harmony being played.

Miraculously, Lucknow did not witness a single incident of violence (see

<http://www.peacedirect.org/wp-content/uploads/War-Prevention-Works.pdf> and

<http://www.peoplebuildingpeace.org/thestories/article.php?id=98&typ=theme>)