

October Action: Letters to the Editor (LTEs) regarding Nobel Prize and Youth PROMISE Act

On Friday, October 11th, the Nobel committee will have announced this year's Peace Prize winner. Whether or not we got our local paper to publish last month's Op-Ed, we plan to **continue the peacebuilding conversation** with our local editors and the public by writing letters to the editor using the Nobel Peace Prize announcement as our news "hook."

This is a chance to promote the Youth PROMISE Act. If it is easy to do so, you might also publicize any great peacebuilding work you may be aware of in your local community (teachers bringing peer-mediation into local schools, programs working to mitigate gang violence, a local Restorative Justice program, etc.)

Reducing Youth Violence and Incarceration - through practical, local, money-saving methods – and promoting the Youth PROMISE Act is what this letter is about.

Every paper has its own criteria regarding letter length and other considerations. For the structure of the content, please use the "E.P.I.C." format – illustrated below with some suggested content for each section.

Basic Steps

1. Identify local daily newspapers. Find list here: http://bit.ly/find_newspapers It is likely that only daily newspapers will cover the announcement. The announcement will be in the print edition on October 12th and in the online edition on the 11th.
2. Look in the paper or online to their letters to the editor section to find the criteria for submitting a letter.
3. Read a few LTEs they have published to get an idea of how writers begin them.
4. (Optional) Identify local area peacebuilding entities to mention.
5. Ascertain whether your two US Senators and/or any local US House Members are already co-sponsoring the Youth PROMISE Act (so you will know whether to thank them or urge them to co-sponsor:
 - a. Go to www.peacealliance.org/ypa-sponsors/ View the list of current co-sponsors
6. Write and submit your letter, using their criteria and the E.P.I.C. format below.

Note: for the "hook" to be relevant, letter should be submitted as soon as possible after October 11! Saturday, October 12th, just after The Peace Alliance conference call would be ideal. Have Fun, Write Well, and Build Peace!

The "E.P.I.C." Format

Engage:

To the Editors:

Reference the article announcing the 2013 Nobel Peace Prize winner. In about one sentence state your reaction to it, perhaps a positive reaction to the celebration of peace, and/or regarding this particular recipient – along with some concern about more local issues.

Problem:

Mention (in your own words) the national tragedy of rampant violence and incarceration among American youth, and provide a few statistics (e.g. Homicide and suicide are the second and third leading causes of death in the US among people aged 15-19¹, The US is about 5% of the world's population, yet accounts for more than 25% of the world's incarceration², A 2002 study found that the US incarcerates

¹ Child Trends Data Bank - <http://www.childtrends.org/?indicators=teen-homicide-suicide-and-firearm-deaths>

² Talvi, Silja J.A. (2007). *Women Behind Bars: The Crisis of Women in the U.S Prison System*. California: Seal Press. pp. xv.

more than ten times as many people under age 18 as any of the of the other 20 industrialized nations studied – in most cases more than twenty times as many.³)

Inform About the Solution:

There are courageous people in our city (or throughout our nation) who are working every day to reduce violence, to strengthen peaceful community. Who are some local peacebuilding heroes among youth in your area? If you are not aware of any, you can talk about peer mediation programs, social/emotional learning and, restorative practices in school discipline, after-school programs, or Big Brothers/Big Sisters. [E.g. After the Longmont Community Justice Partnership (in Longmont Colorado) implemented its Community Restorative Justice Program, recidivism rates among youth dropped to less than 10% in its first three years⁴; and in West Philadelphia High School, within two years of implementing a Restorative Discipline program, incidents of assault and disorderly conduct dropped more than 65%⁵].

Tell how such programs need much more attention and funding (though the projected eventual cost savings from reducing incarceration are huge) and how the Youth PROMISE Act, a bi-partisan bill currently before both houses of Congress. (H.R. 1318 and S. 1307), would empower local communities to choose the solutions best suited to their needs.

The bill 1) funds evidence-based violence prevention & intervention practices, 2) empowers local control and community oversight, 3) reduces crime and saves taxpayer money, and 4) creates accountability by linking funding to measurable success.

Cities that receive grants under the Youth PROMISE Act will be required to track governmental cost savings that accompany a drop in crime, and recapture a portion of those savings to keep the PROMISE programs alive after the federal grant period ends.

The bill's passage would create unprecedented investments in proven community-based violence prevention and intervention practices, such as mentoring, after school programs and other innovative diversion strategies.

Call to Action:

Thank your US Senators and Members of the House of Representatives (by name) for co-sponsoring the bill or ask them to do so if they are not co-sponsors. (See the “Basic Steps” above, number 5 for a way to find out if your Federal Representatives are co-sponsors).

You might also call on fellow citizens, to support local peacebuilders where possible, with time and money and to support The Youth Promise Act via www.YouthPromiseAction.org.

(Depending on your paper’s criteria, you may be limited to 150 or 200 words, so you may need to keep each of these sections very concise.)

Signing Off

Under your signature mention that you are a member of The Peace Alliance locally.

³ Figures for September 2002, taken from report entitled “Cross-national comparison of youth justice” (Youth Justice Board, 2008)

⁴ National Research Center’s Analysis of the Longmont Community Justice Partnership 2007-2009
http://www.lcjp.org/images/stories/pdf/LCJP_2007-2009_Report_Final.pdf

⁵ “Improving School Climate; Findings from Schools Implementing Restorative Practices” a report from the International Institute for Restorative Practices, 2009.