

## **December Action: Write Your Representative about House Bill HR 808, The U.S. Department of Peacebuilding Act of 2013**

*"Though force can protect in emergency, only justice, fairness, consideration and cooperation can finally lead men to the dawn of eternal peace." -President Dwight D. Eisenhower*

This month our focus is on generating co-sponsors and additional support for H.R. 808 which would create a U.S. Department of Peacebuilding. We will write a letter to our U.S. Congressmembers in the House of Representatives. The legislation itself, and our letters will expand the awareness and use of peacebuilding tools -in families, communities, nationally and internationally -especially during a time of year when we are more focused on "Peace on Earth; Goodwill toward all."

### **Preparation:**

1. Find out who your Member of Congress (MOC) is and how to contact them and ascertain whether s/he is already co-sponsoring H.R.808 (so you will know whether to thank them or urge them to co-sponsor in the letter):
  - a. Find your MOC here: [www.peacealliance.org/congress-lookup](http://www.peacealliance.org/congress-lookup).
  - b. Go to [www.govtrak.us/congress/bills/113/hr808](http://www.govtrak.us/congress/bills/113/hr808) to view the list of current co-sponsors. If your MOC was a co-sponsor in the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress and hasn't signed back on yet, you might mention this in your letter. (See lists of co-sponsors in both this session and the prior, via the "Supplemental December Materials" link on the Action Resources page of our website).
2. Most MOCs have a contact form on their website for submitting an e-letter. For handwritten letters, please send to the DC office, and ALSO to local office (Team Leaders might copy, and send both).
3. Team leaders, please bring copies of the Action Sheet, paper, envelopes and stamps (if needed, you can pass the hat and ask for stamp funds). Collect handwritten letters at the end to copy and mail in. People can also use laptops, tablets, etc. to type letters and send. Please make every effort to complete and send the letter at the meeting. If you must take it home to finish, **please** create some kind of buddy system/agreement to follow up afterward and confirm completion – perhaps by email or phone.
4. Follow-up phone calls: one person from your group should be the liaison to the Congressperson's office and follow-up (again, to both DC and local offices) to make sure they receive the group's letters. For a suggested phone call script, please see the "Supplemental December Materials" link on the Action Resources page of our website.

### **Suggested Letter Outline --Please Personalize**

- 1 **Introduce yourself briefly** as a constituent, writing as a concerned citizen, parent, teacher, or whatever. \_
- 2 **Speak/write from your heart** to create authentic connection. Share a brief personal story about why this issue is important to you -especially at this time of year when people often wish each other peace.
- 3 **Share some statistics** showing some of the costs of violence, and also statistics showing the effectiveness of peacebuilding programs that save lives and taxpayer dollars. See talking points below.
- 4 **Call to Action: IMPORTANT** -Thank your Member of Congress for co-sponsoring the bill or ask them to do so if they are not co-sponsors (H.R. 808). Request that they respond to you, so you know what position they are taking on the bill. You may also express your appreciation for other peacebuilding legislation they have supported, such as the Youth Promise Act and note the potential expansion of such peacebuilding efforts embodied in the Department of Peacebuilding Act. If they are already a supporter, we can ask if they would be willing to sign an op-ed on the legislation.

### **Some Basic In-depth Background; What is HR 808 -the Department of Peacebuilding Act?**

HR 808 will establish a Cabinet-level Federal Department focused on the cultivation of peace as a national policy objective, including development of policies that promote national and international conflict prevention, nonviolent intervention, mediation, peaceful conflict resolution, and structured conflict mediation. This mission will be carried out by establishing within the Department, Offices of: Peace Education and Training, Domestic Peace Activities, International Peace Activities, Technology for Peace, Arms Control and Disarmament, Peacebuilding Information and Research, Human Rights and Economic Rights and the Intergovernmental Advisory Council on Peace. These offices will collaborate and share resources with government agencies, nongovernment entities, educators, business and the private sector to create and promulgate proven and cost effective measures, programs and policies that foster a culture of peace.

**Peacebuilding has been defined** by the United Nations as involving "a range of measures targeted to reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities at all levels for conflict management, and to lay the foundations for sustainable peace and development." This new Department would research, articulate, promote, and provide leading edge peacebuilding practices for every level of society. Approximately 85% of its focus would be domestic.

## Sample Talking Points

### Costs of Violence and Incarceration

- In the U.S., youth homicide rates are more than 10 times that of other leading industrialized nations, on par with the rates in developing countries and those experiencing rapid social and economic changes. (see "World Report on Violence and Health," World Health Organization 2002).
- With only 5% of the world's population, the U.S. has 25% of the world's prison population – that makes us the world's largest jailer (see ACLU report: "The Prison Crisis" at [www.aclu.org](http://www.aclu.org)).
- In the past 40 years, we have increased our incarcerated population from 200,000 to 2.3 million. (see Equal Justice Initiative report on "Prisons and Sentencing Reform" at [www.eji.org/prisons](http://www.eji.org/prisons)).

**Solutions** -- Below are just a few of the many effective trends and programs that are working and would be strengthened by the united focus, collaboration, and networking that a U.S. Department of Peacebuilding would provide. A longer list is available via the "Supplemental December Materials" link on the Action Resources page of our website.

- In the US there are currently 227 college and graduate level degree programs in Peace and Conflict Studies – a generation of budding experts, preparing to embark in this growing peacebuilding economy.
- The Community Conferencing Center in Baltimore, Maryland, provides a forum for people who have participated in and been affected by behavior that has involved serious harm. In this circle-process, the group finds ways to repair the damage and to prevent further harm. Community Conferencing, the first such program to be conducted in a large American city, has resulted in a 60% reduction in recidivism, compared to similar local cases in the traditional juvenile justice system.
- The Conflict Stabilization Operations Bureau of the State Department has worked effectively and cooperatively to reduce violence in hotspots from Syria to Honduras to Burma and elsewhere. As reported just last week (12/5/13) in a Bureau bulletin, CSO was in Kenya during their elections this year to help prevent a rerun of the violence that erupted after the 2007 balloting, when more than 1,300 Kenyans died and 660,000 were displaced. One of their assignments was to coordinate election observation with teams from Germany, the United Kingdom, Japan, and other countries. The election this year, with their help, was largely peaceful! This is the type of program that H.R. 808 would expand.
- The Complex Crises Fund at USAID has provided fast, flexible locally empowering responses to volatile situations throughout the world. "After the contested November 28, 2010 presidential elections in Cote D'Ivoire, an outbreak of intense violence followed during which 3,000 people lost their lives, and hundreds of thousands of civilians were displaced. The Complex Crises Fund has supported the establishment of a more equitable, responsive, and legitimate government. Through work with the government and local groups, CCF resources have helped identify and respond to community-prioritized needs and encouraged a peaceful political transition." (FCNL report "Rapid response Funding to Help Prevent Deadly Conflict" at [FCNL.org](http://FCNL.org)). CCF's is another approach that H.R. 808 would expand.
- The US Institute of Peace provides policy recommendations and consulting where violent upheaval is imminent or prevalent – their analyses have been pivotal in hotspots worldwide, like in Iraq, as Anthony Zinni (*retired Marine general, who was commander in chief of the United States Central Command from 1997 to 2000*) wrote in his 2011 New York Times Op-Ed: "In 2007, when the Army's 10th Mountain Division arrived in Mahmudiya, a city of half a million in the "triangle of death" dominated by Al Qaeda south of Baghdad, officers asked the institute to mediate between Shiite civil authorities and the Sunni sheiks who controlled the area. Institute-trained negotiators convened warring Iraqis to consolidate security, restore services, develop the local economy, enhance local governance and improve the rule of law. Gen. David H. Petraeus called it a turning point in the war." A US Department of Peacebuilding would cooperate with and support expansion of the USIP's important research and diplomatic efforts.

For more information and resources, including other powerful quotes, please visit  
<http://www.peacealliance.org/take-action/action-resources>