



**September 2018 – HAND DELIVERED – Washington, D.C.**

## **Students Request Congress to Create a Department of Peacebuilding**

Dear Members of Congress,

We come to Washington, DC to celebrate International Day of Peace, “The Right to Peace and Celebrating 70 Years of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” The world has a right to peace. We are here to deliver **messages from America’s young people – and adults -- that they have a right to peace, there is no place for violence and they urge legislators to listen to them and to create a cabinet-level Department of Peacebuilding (HR 1111).** *To cosponsor HR 1111, contact the office of Congresswoman Barbara Lee (CA-13) at 202-225-2661 as soon as possible.*

Last year we brought to you letters from students, and adult supporters, in San Diego and Los Angeles, CA. **This year we bring many more letters** from San Diego students, Bishop George McKinney, City Council President Myrtle Cole, San Diego Board of Education Member Dr. Sharon Whitehurst-Payne, e3 Civic High School CEO Helen Griffith, All In San Diego Founder Lan E. Jefferson, Grandmother Cynthia Gilliam, and Daniel Horton. **Their voices represent this nation.**

Students wrote about **their experiences with violence, their fears, their hopes. They implore adults and members of Congress to listen to them.** For them, **violence is not an abstract concept.** They are concerned about domestic violence in their homes, violence in their schools, violence on the streets and in their communities, violence in their country and in this world. These concerns also include bullying; school shootings and gun violence; homicide and suicide; human trafficking; economic inequality, lack of jobs and homelessness; hate and violence relating to discrimination, race and ethnicity; police brutality; and terrorism.

***The students wrote that by establishing a Department of Peacebuilding, we will be able to devote the time and resources to resolving the many forms of violence and can turn our attention to economic equality, curing diseases and other pressing issues.***

### **MESSAGES FROM STUDENTS**

#### **I. Forms of Violence & Fears**

Students wrote about many forms of violence and fears relating to community violence; domestic violence; ethnic violence and racism; school violence, bullying and school shootings; and terrorism.

##### **A. Community Violence:**

- “... a child shouldn’t have to feel fear when playing in the streets .. no one should have to feel fear when going down the streets. **Communities are supposed to be safe places, not hostile environments.**” Unsigned
- “.. our communities should be safe places. I also think that we shouldn’t be afraid to visit community centers such as libraries, schools, churches, and community pools or parks. I feel that **every time we go to school or church we shouldn’t have to think about when the next mass shooting going to happen ...**” Gabby Townsend

- “An issue that must be solved is community violence because underage **kids should not be targeted**. In fact, any human being in society don’t deserve to be targeted. Men, women, and children have equal rights so **no innocent [lives] should be taken away**. Children should have the right to play at the park and not be targeted. All living things should be served with respect.” Juliana Ngo
- “... people are dying in this community that don’t deserve to die. People no longer feel safe just stepping out their homes. Children can’t even play outside without parents being super worried ... It’s **no longer safe or fun in the streets**.” R’ryannah Gaines
- “I fear that someone in downtown will end up getting shot at. **Anyone that is having a bad day and is armed may result in an innocent life in danger**.” Christina Arias
- “Violence is a problem in City Heights which is home to many nationalities and **one of the largest refugee communities in the country**. **Street fights, gangs, and school violence are part of my daily life**.” Chris Htoo
- “For me personally I don’t feel safe in my neighborhood ... There’s been a lot of **shootings and almost every day when I go out I hear either cops and/or a helicopter going around my home ...**” Because of a car accident, a **man shot a MOTHER** who was on her way to pick up her daughter from school. “**This need to stop ... Everyone deserves to be happy**. Families should never go through this.” Estela Maciel
- “**Police officers are often seen as a violent force** instead of a helping hand ...” Unsigned
- “I fear that because of the hate and cruelty something terrible might happen ... brown people and or any people are being mistreated. Erick Garner was ... smoking a cigarette which is legal yet he was tackled and put in a choke hold which then killed him. He wasn’t killed by just anyone, he was murdered by Daniel Pantaleo a New York City Police Department officer, someone who is supposed to protect and serve our country. **If we’re getting killed and mistreated by the police who are supposed to be our heroes and save us from danger who can we trust**.” Kailine Harrison
- Community violence “can cause trauma, injuries and even death ... Not only does this problem cause physical problems but **economy problems as well**. **\$300 billion goes into community violence** alone ... there are about **30,7000 estimated gangs** since 2012.” Alejandro Alonso
- **Community violence in San Diego also relates to “sex trafficking** as we are near Mexico and not only that but we have a port as well.” Ryon Mkkkan

## **B. Domestic Violence:**

- “**Home should be a place where you should feel safe** and not insecure ...” Keily Aju Leon
- “I’ve seen and heard of **so many people who have been dramatically affected by domestic violence**. **My friends, may family, myself** ... domestic violence comes in so many different forms, whether it’s parents fighting, a father being abusive, a mother being abusive, even as far as a child being abusive ... Why are people so sick in the head to feel the need to hurt the ones they’re supposed to love?” “**When someone abuses a kid, they are likely to grow up and do the same** ... Children follow the steps of the people they see ...” Mariarenee A.
- “Domestic violence **plagues many families in America**, whether it’s from the wife being beaten, or children being abused.” Eligah Johnson
- **Domestic violence hurts** ... “It hurts to think that there are people out there that could harm family. Their children, their wives or husbands, cousins, sisters, brothers. There are people who are hurting or harassing these people, their own family. Any event in mine or your life could have caused that to be us. We could have been abused, and no one would know about for years ... if ever. **Any one of us could have been physically or sexually harassed by one of our very own family members, or we could have ended up doing the same to them ...**” Jacob T. Cole
- “... **It is not okay for families to hurt each other** ... a husband beating his wife or a dad hurting his son unfairly ...” Daniel Breshears

- “I was only 12 years old when I witnessed domestic violence for the first time in my own home and continued to hear about it occurring with a sibling throughout my life ... There are a few women in my family that have experienced this **and I want to be able to help prevent it from happening to other women in their households, on the streets, and anywhere that they don’t feel safe ... Domestic violence also includes emotional abuse ...**” Berencie Varela
- “We could **stop domestic violence and redirect the money to other causes.**” Kurt Lara-Rosales

### C. Ethnic Violence & Racism:

- “... in these recent years, people have been **hating on certain types of ethnicities ...**” Nicholas Cardenas
- “With the **president** we have now, he is **teaching people to hate** and assume the worst.” Illegible Signature
- “People should not discriminate [against] someone by their skin color. **Someone shouldn’t say that if he looks Middle Eastern, they are terrorists or if someone is Mexican or black that they are in gangs. This gets into people’s minds and they start to believe this.**” Angel Ibarra
- Violence against ethnicities “concerns me because me and many of my friends and family being of African American decent or minorities in this country **violence against ethnicities is very likely possible to happen to someone we know.**” Laylah Redden
- Violence against certain ethnicities “concerns me because **black people get pulled over and Mexicans are usually asked for their papers** or are being assumed that they don’t have enough money.” Nicole Vazquez
- “Racism happens everywhere and every day ... **I myself go through racism all the time. I’m African American ...**” Faith Broadway
- “I do not feel safe when I go out **because I’m afraid someone will try to hurt me because I’m colored,** and I’m only in high school.” Anabella C. Morales
- “... **Ethnic violence or prejudice is very present in my Hispanic community.** The racism and hatred against the Latino race in the U.S. has become stronger and more present after our current administration was put in place 2 years ago ... it is a **societal disease that has plagued many parts of our country.**” Jahaziel Lomeli
- “Being Hispanic is not weird where I live since it is so diverse. Although it’s pretty upsetting that whenever my family decides to take a road trip **we get stopped whether on a train or seeing if my father has identification ... I have had friends that have lost cousins, brothers, fathers, uncles due to violence caused by the color of their skin ...**” Alejandra Tapia
- “... **families and people are killed because certain people don’t like our race.** I am not comfortable with hearing gunshots in our neighborhood or even screaming of people at night ... **The color of our skin should not make us afraid of violence from others in the community or those in law enforcement.**” Angel Romero
- “The color of someone’s skin should not be a reason for someone to be poorly treated. **Everyone has the right to be treated equally and anyone who thinks otherwise should not be given a badge and gun.**” Jonathan Tovar

### D. School Violence, Bullying and School Shootings:

- “... **nowadays people don’t feel secure and safe inside their own school** which should ALWAYS be a safe environment for students to learn ...” Joana Oliver
- “**I always wonder if someone is going to come shoot up my school** or do any harm to a student or to all of us as a community.” Claudette Morales
- “**People send their kids to school believing they will be safe.** There are kids who don’t even come home ...” Brytanny Patino-Gomez

- "... even if our school wasn't the one who went through the shootings, we start to get skeptical of people around us, our friends, our peers ... **everyone in fear that we too will have a day where we will be in that same situation.**" Dulce Gomez
- "School shootings could happen at any school any time ... This causes extreme pain and trauma for the victims' families and the shooting survivors. It is **our job as a nation to demolish school shootings ... Imagine the next school that gets terrorized is the school your sister, brother, cousin, niece or nephew attend** ... emotional damage caused once it has happened ... It's only the beginning for those who await a **lifetime of sadness and sorrow** ... Every time students and learning facilitators enter the school, they are reminded everywhere about what took place in their school. Many of the victims even suffer from PTSD ... the **families of victims hold endless pain in their hearts** for the rest of their lives ..." Samantha Toerino
- Regarding school violence, "there is not a single reason for this problem, some **students become violent by just following the behavior and actions they've seen at home, videogames, movies, streets.** They may feel rejected by their classmates or they are having a hard time at home, feeling angry or depressed. One of the most important reasons is when they have **access to weapons...**" Andrea Sanchez
- Kids "go to school with fear that they might die ... **Bullying not only endanger the victim it raise the chances for school shootings.** We should work on making schools a safe place for students to be themselves." Edwin Machado
- School violence ... "**Teachers are tasked not only to teaching, but are also constantly being on the lookout for troubled students and are having to take great measures to ensure our safety.** It can also lead to **mental health disorders.** All of the fear and stress can lead to depression, PTSD, and the ability to perform secure attachments. Some parents are so fearful that it **causes students to miss more days of school,** which disrupts their learning experience." Anaya M.
- "**Parents wouldn't want to let them in schools anymore if this violence keeps happening.**" Gracie Kuyper
- "It's **ridiculous that students even get ahold of these firearms** and I feel like the parents should feel accountable for what their kids do. If parents are accountable then parents will better lock up their weapons or not even have one at all ..." Anthony Solorzano
- "... the amount of school shooting that have taken place in the U.S. is rising and **isn't showing any signs of letting up.**" Albert Henderson
- "... in just this year there have been 23 school shootings in which students or staff members have been seriously injured or killed ... **despite protest and movement to put a stop to school shootings, little to nothing is being done.** I live in a neighborhood that is riddled with drugs and violence ..." Benjamin Hidalgo
- "**Dreams will die if their body goes away.**" Unsigned

#### E. Terrorism:

- "... terrorism and violent acts toward the U.S. ... concerns me because **many innocent people die.**" Jorge Herrera Lopez
- "Terrorism and violent acts toward the US are something that should be taken care of immediately. I am concerned about this because **you might never know if there will be a war.**" Isabella Terre

## II. Interconnectedness

Students wrote about many forms of violence and how they are connected.

- "I come to you because I want our streets, neighborhoods, cities, towns, and everywhere in the United States is safer. **Main reasons I have seen people doing these things is because [they're] jobless and they have no home or no one that can support them ...**" Johnathon Salmond

- “Domestic violence ... **if this is happening at home the kids can take it all out at school.**” Jeremy Aceves
- “**School violence doesn’t just mean school shootings. Bullying** is a huge problem that I’ve seen and experienced. This also leads people to **worry, feel more insecure, and even self-harm and death.** I’ve read posts on social media about little kids killing themselves because of bullying ...” Anaya M.
- “According to the Safe Schools Initiative Report, **71% of school shooters are victims of extreme bullying.**” Michael Prado
- “People are dying every day because of **racism. Not only getting killed but people are killing themselves** because people talk bad about them because of the way they look. No one should ever have to go through that because of the color of their skin, everyone is beautiful in their own way.” Faith Broadway
- “Where there is act of **violence toward ethnicities, people will probably end up in gangs ...** When these gangs have conflicts, it will act on gang violence against each other, which strikes fear and maybe may lead to casualties ... it also may affect police reinforcements. It’s the police’s job to protect us but sometimes with **too much gang violence there are going to be racist judgment(s) in the police enforcements. These both types of violence are tied together...**” Daniel Olea
- “I feel like to help with the Peacemaking **people should accept people even if you don’t like them you should respect each other.** I feel especially with **the police they should stop shooting people for no reason and especially with African Americans.**” Sarah Weber
- **Instead of all the money expended relating to domestic violence,** “instead of pay for them to be in the hospital we can send all that money to **cancer research and other diseases** that we need to make a cure for.” Emiliano Yanez
- “**Gun violence** in schools is not only ending with the lives of those that are victims of such tragedies. Along with **lives,** their opportunities to educate themselves, go to college, and be the **next generation of doctors or world changers...** could’ve been the next people to **find a cure for cancer or make a great discovery ...**” Karla Hernandez

### III. Student Suggestions

Students had many suggestions about violence prevention.

- “The new **Peacebuilding Department could create and fund a number of community programs to fight these problems.** For example, each elementary and middle school could have a **peacebuilding clubs after school to occupy students and prevent gangs ... peacebuilding soccer league with games on the weekend .. a school therapist funded so that kids with mental health issues can get help before turning violent...**” Chris Htoo
- Regarding domestic violence ... “putting these violent people in **therapy to help them reconsider the pain they’re making their victims live in ...**” Melary A.G.
- Regarding domestic violence ... “**keep an eye on that family ...** if someone hears of someone talking about their home issues being abuse based or hurtful, they should be reported. Once reported, the authorities should be in contact with the family and keep a watch on them ... for authorities to take action, they need to have enough proof and understanding on the situation not to act irrationally.” Mariarenee A.
- Regarding racism and prejudice, we could have a **national hotline to report occurrences,** a **task force** dedicated to combating racial hate, a **national survey** about “dislikes” and **courses to teach about equality and unity between races.** Jahziel Lomeli
- “Police brutality is the first thing that should be addressed. **Police officers should be required to take a variety of tests to assure safety for those of different ethnicity** put in difficult situations.” Jonathan Tovar

- “I also thing that **police should go through more intense training** focused more on decision making in the field because that seems like a big problem for many police officers.” Elijah Calero Reed
- “The first step we can take in preventing school violence is to **understand the nature and extent of the problem.**” Anaya M.
- Regarding school violence/ school shootings, “... **see the schools for yourselves** and try to understand the students (teens) ...” Dulce Gomez
- “We need to **teach violence prevention to our nation’s school kids** and ensure that our schools are safe ... School shooting would not be possible if naïve **children did not have access to guns ... limit the amount of guns that are sold ... make the age requirement older**, the requirements for being able to **purchase a gun stricter ... schools should work to improve their social and emotional health for their students ... establish a U.S. Department of Peacebuilding ...**” Kimberly Feurt
- “... have a **bullying control talk** with scholars, encourage students to **get to know their peers, do not exclude any student and do not give access to weapons.**” Andrea Sanchez
- Regarding school shootings, “... **more school drills ... local police department give presentations related to ‘what to do in case of a school shooting’** or even a medical department can come out to give a presentation about **how to help someone in case of a shooting ...**” Nevaeh Santos

#### IV. Hopes

Students wrote that they look forward to one day living in a world where community violence, horrific and scarring domestic violence, violence towards ethnicities and racism, bullying and gun violence in schools, and terrorism and war are not fears and concerns every day. They wrote that **all human should be welcome**. Their hopes include:

- “I myself have been affected by domestic abuse and I’ve lived in domestic abuse shelters as a child ... My hope is that we can one day live in a country where **no one has to be the victim of domestic violence.**” Rile L. Grant
- “Hope that someday we can walk around freely at school and **not think about someone coming into our schools and killing innocent people ...**” Claudette Morales
- “where students, teachers, administration and parents **don’t have to fear about where and how to hide students during a mass shooting ...**” Kimberly Feurt
- “Where there are **no terrorism** and violent acts toward the U.S.” Jorge Herrera Lopez

#### V. Act to Create a Department of Peacebuilding

It is time to create a Department of Peacebuilding.

- “**Having a Peacebuilding Department is a great idea as far as to help out with violence ...** I strongly hope you consider this letter as not only a simple card you get from multiple people every day but to **ask yourself, why do they keep coming ... Why do people still send you letters about this situation.**” Dulce Gomez
- “Every other week, we hear about incidents involving a school shooting, domestic violence, and others like terrorist attacks. Every single time I see things like this on the news, **I realize just how much work is needed to set things back into place ...** I believe that things can change ... The country needs a committee of sorts, to help further assist in these endeavors. This committee needs to focus solely on creating a safe environment in our lands. The people running it need to put the concerns of the people ahead of anything else ...” Michael Prado
- Regarding domestic violence, “I don’t want more kids living in this generation to have to keep quiet and fearful of going home. **I don’t want kids to be afraid of the people who they should love.** I really hope this letter isn’t only read but also heard, and **action is taken** with the right precautions.” Mariarenee A.

- “Establishing a Department of Peacebuilding would be **life-changing to all women, and men as well if they have gone through [domestic violence].**” Berenice Varela
- “I believe that by establishing a Us Department of Peacemaking we will be able to devote the time and resources toward [resolving] community violence in San Diego ... **Let’s make a change in the world instead of complaining.** We Can Do It.” Christina Arias
- “The **people entrust their peace and trust to you all [members of Congress].**” Karla Hernandez
- “I believe that **everyone deserves to live in peace ... All this violence has to stop so we can have a better future.**” Jonan Solis

## MESSAGES FROM ADULTS

### Bishop George D. McKinney

#### St. Stephen’s Cathedral Church of God in Christ Ministries

“I have been in ministry for 70 years and have served as the Senior Pastor of St. Stephen’s Cathedral of God In Christ for 55 years this month (September 2017). I have had a lifelong personal commitment to peaceful living and peacebuilding .. I am often called upon during times of turmoil and distress o be a voice for reason and peace .. **An official, Cabinet-level position of Secretary of the US Department of Peacebuilding will go a long way to create an environment that chooses peace over chaos, love over hate and friendship over enemies ...**” Bishop George D. McKinney

### Myrtle Cole

#### San Diego City Council, Council President, Fourth Council District

“During this time of divisiveness and intolerance, it is important to work for a **culture of nonviolence and inclusion. We owe this to our children and ourselves ...** Please support the children of San Diego and young people throughout our national by cosponsoring Department of Peacebuilding legislation.” Myrtle Cole

### Dr. Sharon Whitehurst-Payne

#### San Diego Unified School District, Vice President, Board of Education

“Peace if vital. For many years, I have supported San Diego **young people**, including San Diego Kids for Peace, who are working to make our schools and communities safe and peaceful places. **They know the pain when people do not accept and respect one another.** They know that we must build peace in our own beings and in our families, schools and communities. **It is time to make violence prevention a national priority.**” Dr. Sharon Whitehurst-Payne

### Helen V. Griffith, Ed.D.

#### E3 Civic High, Chief Executive Officer

“I want a world with more peace, unity and acceptance ... [students] were born to make a difference and to be a positive change in this world ... I urged my students to **celebrate all people. That is what a Department of Peacebuilding is about.**” Helen Griffith, Ed.D., CEO at e3 High School

### Lan E. Jefferson

#### All In San Diego Founder

“As a child **born during the horrific times of the Vietnam War in 1969**, I am all too familiar with what it is like not to experience peace or freedom and live in an era of unrest! I lived in two different Vietnamese orphanages up until age 4 ½ and at age 48, **I am still physically and emotionally scarred** by the devastation four decades later ... **Peace is a right for everyone ...** to live peacefully among one another and help our country prioritize (ending terrorism, shutting down gang violence, establishing friendly borders, making peace a way of life, empowering peace as a state of mind, etc.), we have to be the ones to set the climate (tone, theme, agenda, etc.) for our country of wanting and needing to be a country of peace ... **There is no more time to debate or disagree about making and passing a**

**law to establish a Department of Peacebuilding ... Too many lives are being lost daily.”** Lan E. Jefferson

**Cynthia Gilliam**

**Director for Partners 4 Peace International and Grandmother**

About the Department of Peacebuilding, “As a grandmother, I say **you have let our children down** in a time like this. We need peace not hate ... This is what I call **a 911 Call to Congress for our youth** ... we the people need you to move this into law for our youth in a Diego and for youth everywhere in this Nation ...” – Cynthia Gilliam, Grandmother

**Daniel Horton**

**Concerned Citizen**

“It is through peace that economies can flourish, communities can come and grow together, love is made stronger, minds are healed, bodies are healed, and above all, the world is made stronger ... A **Department of Peacebuilding will save lives, families, communities, and money. More importantly, it is the right thing to do.**” – Daniel Horton, Concerned Citizen

Peace is a right. It is time to prioritize peace and to create a Department of Peacebuilding.

**Nancy Merritt, [sunmountain@aol.com](mailto:sunmountain@aol.com)**

**On Behalf of the National Department of Peacebuilding Committee  
And Department of Peacebuilding Supporters**

**“I believe that everyone deserves to live in peace ... All this violence has to stop so we can have a better future.”** Jonan Solis, San Diego High School Student