

# The Cyprus Friendship Programme (CFP)

## People united in a country divided

**Background: From Catholic and Protestant Youth in Northern Ireland to Turkish-speaking and Greek-speaking Cypriot Youth in Cyprus**

The Cyprus Friendship Programme (CFP) is modeled on the all-volunteer Children's Friendship Project for Northern Ireland (CFPNI), a peace and friendship building programme that successfully brought together more than 2,000 Protestant and Catholic teenagers, as well as their families and their friends, in Northern Ireland throughout its 21 year existence. The programme came to its successful completion in 2007. The CFP started in 2009 as an initiative of HasNa, a small US non-profit organisation in cooperation with a Cypriot team of coordinators.

**How the programme works: Roommates for a month - friends for life**

Teenagers (15 to 18 years old) from both communities apply to join the programme after presentations are made in schools and youth clubs in both sides of the divided island.

Interviews are conducted and the successful applicants who demonstrate their commitment to bi-communal relations are accepted into the programme in equal numbers.

A series of meetings, with facilitated workshop activities, takes place that focus on leadership, communication, reconciliation and peace building skills.

At the end of the workshops, each teenager chooses one person from the 'other side' of the same gender with whom they feel comfortable.

Each pair of teenagers and their families are introduced and encouraged to establish and maintain friendships in Cyprus.

In the summer, each pair of teenagers lives with host families in the United States, sharing a bedroom together, for a four-week residential.

It also allows them to experience a country where many differing cultures and religions live together in peace.

Typically strong bonds of friendship also build between the teenagers and their host family that last well beyond the summer residential.

Another important aim of the residential is to further advance leadership and peace building skills which had been promoted during the programme activities that occurred in Cyprus. This is done through four formal programme activities during the residential (team building, conflict resolution training, community service, and civic engagement).

Upon return from the US residential, additional activities take place. Prior to the end of the year a CFP Graduation occurs. After graduating, each participant is required to participate in the CFP Alumni Programme and be further involved in bi-communal activities for at least one year.

**The success of the first two years of CFP – 38 teens and their families**

The first group of ten pairs of Cypriot teenagers went



The 2010 group with a message for all Cypriots

to the US in July 2009 and the second of nine pairs in July of 2010. Currently the target for the 2011 group is for 25 pairs – or 50 Cypriot families. Upon their return to Cyprus in both cases, as they were coming out from the airport all the families were there, Turkish and Greek Cypriot, applauding and cheering their children together. The teens of both years enthusiastically started their alumni programme of peace building activities and are still going strong. The bonds that have been created between the pairs, as well as the larger group, their families and friends are an example of the future we all want in Cyprus being brought to the present. They meet regularly both formally but also socially demonstrating to all that peaceful coexistence is possible in Cyprus. Despite being under a lot of pressure from school and exams their commitment to peace building work is exemplary. Here is a small *sample* of what they have been doing:

Radio and TV presentations of their peace building work were made a number of times. For example, a 20 minute CyBC TV programme focusing on the friendship of two of the teenagers had many positive reviews and was shown for a second time on prime time.

Bi-communal presentations in schools and youth clubs in both parts of the island have been made despite tremendous obstacles that included serious threats by extremists. The teenagers of the Cyprus Friendship Programme, showing courage and unrivaled commitment continue their work with even more passion to help build a culture of peace. *Bi*-communal presentations by youth to *mono*-communal audiences in schools is a very rare occurrence and in this sense the CFP are true leaders in opening new possibilities in the peace building work among the youth.

Everywhere they go they take an army helmet that has flowers planted in it. They have requested to meet the leaders of the two communities and give them each a present of one such helmet. Their hope is that when there will be a solution and Cyprus will be demilitarised, the two leaders will give thousands of helmets to Cypriot families who will turn them into flower pots to hang outside their houses.

The group has decided to 'adopt' one child from a Third World country by collecting and sending money every month.

### **The documentary with the Elders**

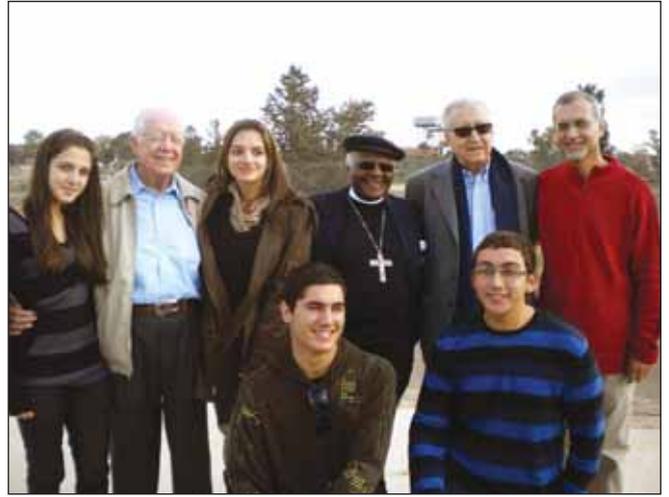
In December 2009 the Elders organisation chose the CFP group for the filming of a documentary about the missing persons of both communities. Interviews of each of the teenager pairs were conducted via skype and two pairs were chosen. The official launching of the documentary took place in Nicosia and in London on 8 and 10 February of 2011 respectively.

Photos from the 2010 graduation: <http://www.facebook.com/album.php?aid=240130&id=573082630&baafbeed94>.

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**The Elders with the Cyprus Friendship Programme**

## **Digging the Past in Search of the Future: The Elders and Cyprus**

The Friends of Cyprus and Cypriots 4 Cyprus was happy to encourage as many politicians and London based Cypriots as possible to see the film, Digging the Past to search for the Future, and to meet the school students who investigated the Missing with the Elders. Below from his blog Desmond Tutu writes about the experience.

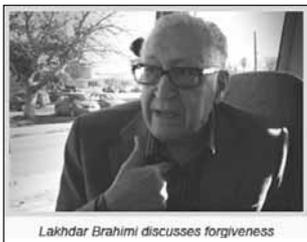
### **Archbishop Desmond Tutu writes on his blog:**

#### **Forgiving, not forgetting**

*"My family... they had 16 missing people. And 15 of them were found dead, and one of them is still missing. And they went through a lot of atrocities in the war. And I wanted to ask you: how do people get over that?"*

Decades after living through a period of terrible conflict, there are many families on the divided island of Cyprus for whom old wounds have not yet healed. I was travelling to an exhumation site in the Cypriot capital, Nicosia with my fellow Elders Lakhdar Brahimi and Jimmy Carter when 16-year old Michael asked us this question.

#### **Forgiving, not forgetting**



*Lakhdar Brahimi discusses forgiveness*

Michael's question was not easy to answer. Lakhdar Brahimi was quite adamant that he, for one, would not be able to forgive a person who had killed a member of his family.

In time, he suggested, he would accept that the best way to honour the memory of a loved one was to try and make sure that others do not suffer the same fate. But, he said, "I will not forget; I will not forgive."

I was forced to challenge my friend. It is true that we should not forget – remembering is very important in guarding against further tragedy and in teaching our children the lessons of history. But forgiving is not the same as forgetting.

Forgiveness does not come easily and it may take a very long time. From my experience in South Africa and many other parts of the world where people have suffered terrible losses, I have come to understand forgiveness as a difficult and often painful journey.

And yet I am continually amazed by our ability and willingness to submit to this painful process. It is as though we instinctively know that by acknowledging the humanity of all people, even those you once considered the enemy, it is possible to bring peace inside your own heart.

The alternative is a harsh one. It means living with bitterness and animosity, making it very hard for any society to grow and flourish.

In Cyprus I hope that in time families will be able to see something of their own struggle, their own tragedy, in the other. I hope that they can say, 'Yes, I have suffered. And those people on the other side: they have suffered too.' Even more importantly, 'We must make sure that in the future nobody else suffers as we have done.' On this, Lakhdar and I are in total agreement.



*The group visits the laboratory*

#### **Digging the past...**

In December 2009, we Elders were in Cyprus to film a documentary about a very difficult and painful issue: the thousands of missing people from both communities, many of whom have been missing for more than forty years. Their families never discovered what happened to them – they never had a funeral at which to grieve, or a grave at which to lay flowers.

We visited exhumation sites, where scientists from the Committee on Missing Persons dig the ground and sieve through mud to look for these missing people. We also travelled to the laboratory where their bones are carefully documented, reassembled and DNA-tested until finally they can be given a name.

These scientists, who came from both north and south to work together, were not setting out to find

people to blame. Instead, their efforts go into answering the burning questions in the minds of all the families whose parents, brothers, children, were lost. *Where is my loved one? How did he or she die?*

At last, the family is called and the remains returned to them. For the first time, they can see the physical evidence of their loss; they can ask what happened and find out how their loved one died. For these families, this can bring the closure they have sought for decades.

In the film, you see us meeting two men – one Greek Cypriot, one Turkish Cypriot – who found in the loss of their fathers a common experience. These two remarkable men have taken this tragedy that they share, and used it to promote understanding between their two communities. To see the young people listening to and learning from their own elders was very moving for us.

#### **...in search of the future**

Cyprus remains a divided island, but there are many

working hard to try to find a solution that will end the separation of the two communities and, I hope, allow the wounds of the past to heal. On this journey, we discovered that some of those longing to end the division of their island are only teenagers themselves, too young to remember the conflict but old enough to understand the painful memories of their families and communities.

It was such a privilege to spend time with these impressive young people, so wise beyond their years. They can see the need for a deeper understanding of 'the other side', and an acknowledgement that both sides have suffered. They see that a shared future means a shared past.

*The film, Digging the Past in Search of the Future in which the Elders, the Cypriot Friendship Programme and the Committee for Missing Persons cooperated is available for showing to different audiences. You can find out more details by going to their website: [www.theelders.org/cyprus](http://www.theelders.org/cyprus).*

## **Androulla Vassiliou, EU Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth presents the EU Prize for Cultural Heritage/Europa Nostra Awards, Istanbul**

10 June 2010

Ministers, Mme Pack, Presidents of Europa Nostra, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Let me welcome you most warmly to the European Union Award for Cultural Heritage/Europa Nostra Awards.

First, may I congratulate the winners and all those involved in the 2010 award selection for the magnificent work they are doing to ensure that our cultural heritage can be handed on to future generations. The Commission is very much aware of the time and energy you have invested in achieving the excellent results we are celebrating here this evening.

I would also like to thank Europa Nostra for organising this event. And I thank Minister Günay, the Turkish Ministry of Culture and the Agency Istanbul 2010 European Capital of Culture for hosting this ceremony in this wonderful Aya Irini Museum. This building, which resonates with history and culture, is the perfect setting for tonight's prizes to celebrate our cultural heritage.

This modern city of Istanbul is home to a rich mix of cultural heritage and history. In the run-up to becoming a European Capital of Culture for 2010, you have found original and ingenious ways of showcasing valuable heritage. You have opened up culture to people, and in a way that protects its long-term future.

The Istanbul 2010 project is built on solid foundations:



on commitment, on artistic vision, on including people and on cultural and creative partnerships. The restoration of the Sultan's Pavilion in the Yeni Mosque here in Istanbul – one of our prize-winners this evening - shows how a single project can successfully combine all these elements. It shows the positive role of public-private partnerships in heritage conservation, in regenerating urban areas, and in involving people in the long-term care of their heritage.

Caring for cultural heritage and its conservation and restoration is primarily a national responsibility. But I am pleased to say that the Union can lend a helping hand. We fund restoration as part of regional development, as well as research and cultural cooperation projects with a heritage theme.

I am personally very pleased to be responsible for the EU's Culture Programme, which helps to build a European dimension into our cultural lives. As well as injecting funding into hundreds of cross-European cultural projects, we promote our shared cultural heritage in multiple ways: through the European Heritage Days we organise jointly with the Council of Europe; through our proposal for a European Heritage Label; through our European Capitals of Culture; and of course through tonight's awards.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Heritage is about more than our past: it is about how