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“CREATING PEACE THROUGH ART & SPORT”

Since September 11, 2001, our world has become increasingly divided and broken, which has a profound impact on the young hearts and minds of the next generation. A unique contribution to peace and coexistence can be made by art because it is a language-independent medium, which can help develop bonds of trust and understanding between the children of the world. Sports are also powerful tool for building peace that can complement the arts.

This paper focuses on the art and sport based global initiative of the International Child Art Foundation (ICAF) and outlines ICAF's Peace Through Art and Sport Methodology.¹

Focus on Children

In the year 42 A.D., the Roman philosopher Seneca observed that world peace will be secured on a permanent basis when we start teaching our children to view the whole world as one: “Omnis orbs terrarumpatria mea est.” (The whole world is my own native land). Similarly, linking peace with children, Mahatma Gandhi counseled: “If we are to teach real peace in this world, and if we are to carry on a real war against war, we shall have to begin with the children.” More recently, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recognized that the instinctive capacity for creativity and imagination found in young people has often been denied or suppressed in their education: “The encouragement of creativity from an early age is one of the best guarantees of growth in a healthy environment of self-esteem and mutual respect – critical ingredients for building a culture of peace.”²

Art and Sport

In ancient Greece, beauty and strength were considered qualities of the ideal man. Out of the stadia and the arenas, a new citizen arose who aspired to attain an all-around development of the body and mind. Pythagoras, an eminent mathematician and philosopher, was a boxing champion at Olympia. Plato, the philosopher, also took part in the Games. Believing in the

¹ This paper borrows from an earlier paper published by the author: Ashfaq Ishaq, “Peace Through Art and Sport,” *SchoolArts*, Vol. 104, Number 3, November 2004.

² The United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 2005 as the International Year of Sport and Physical Education (IYSPE 2005). Recognizing that a culture of peace can be promoted through sport, and that sports can boost economic activities, the UN launched its *Sports for Development and Peace campaign*, spearheaded by former president of Switzerland, Mr. Adolf Ogi, Under-Secretary-General on Sports for Development and Peace. See, <http://www.un.org/themes/sport/intro.htm>

natural link between art and sport, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, father of modern day Olympics, sought to transform a simple athletic contest into an aesthetic-spiritual celebration.

The importance of linking art and sport has been emphasized by Nelson R. Mandela, Nobel Laureate and former president of South Africa: “Art and sport have the power to change the world, the power to inspire, the power to unite people in a way that little else can. Art and sport speak to people in a language they understand. Art and sport can create hope where there was once only despair. They are instruments for peace, even more powerful than governments.”

ICAF's approach to creating peace embodies the dream of de Coubertin and the wisdom of Nelson Mandela. ICAF's methodology was first employed in a successful peace-building program ICAF organized in 2002 for Greek- and Turkish-Cypriot youth.³ The methodology for the Cyprus Peace Through Art Program was developed in collaboration with the Center for the Study of Mind and Human Interaction at the University of Virginia. In 2004, the methodology was expanded by ICAF to include sport as a peace-building tool.

The Third Arts Olympiad (2005-2008)

The global community faces challenges that require creative and sound leadership. Two natural ways in which children – our future leaders – gain and apply leadership skills is through artistic expression and athletic accomplishment. ICAF's Third Arts Olympiad combines these two themes in order to encourage young artists to develop their physical abilities, and to inspire young athletes to express themselves through art. Through the participation of nearly three million children from over 100 countries, the Arts Olympiad develops the empathy and understanding invoked through art and the team spirit and discipline instilled through sport, to promote the Olympic ideals of mutual respect and tolerance. The children will carry these skills and values with them into adulthood, along with lifelong friendships across borders and cultures. Over time, the trust and understanding achieved through personal connections will bridge global communities.

The Arts Olympiad – ICAF's flagship program – is the world's largest and most prestigious arts initiative for children ages 8 to 12. This free global program commences with lesson plans that lead to painting and digital art competitions on the theme, *My Favorite Sport*. ICAF's office in Washington, DC organizes the Arts Olympiad in the United States and Canada, while ICAF's office in Munich organizes the Arts Olympiad in Germany and coordinates the program in the European Union. In other countries, national Arts Olympiads are organized by ministries of education, culture and sport (e.g., Costa Rica, Israel), cultural organizations (China, Italy),

³ For background on the Cyprus program, please visit www.icafe.org/programs/

national museums (Cayman Islands, Papua New Guinea), national commissions for UNESCO (Croatia, Jamaica), children’s art organizations (India, New Zealand) or children’s television companies (Brazil).

Educational partners help promote ICAF’s programs and organize training workshops at ICAF events. These partners include Americans for the Arts; the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD); Child Welfare League of America (CWLA); Institute for Cultural Diplomacy (ICD); International Fund for the Promotion of Culture (IFPC); the National Art Education Association (NEA); and UNESCO.

Peace through Arts & Sport Methodology

The Third Arts Olympiad is based on ICAF’s Peace Through Arts Sport Methodology. The methodology outlines a five-stage approach to create world peace. These stages are described below:

- a) **Creativity and self-expression:** Structured lesson plans for art teachers and physical education instructors, which provide a framework for art competitions on the theme My Favorite Sport.
- b) **Self-esteem and confidence:** Teachers involve students in judging artwork and arrange exhibitions at local events to showcase children’s creativity and boost their self-confidence.
- c) **National peace-building:** Finalists from different provinces (or states) come together at national festivals, where they apply their own creativity to build a vision of peace and coexistence.
- d) **Regional peace-building:** National finalists attend regional festivals, where they celebrate their national identities, alleviate tension through sport, discover their commonalities, develop regional pride and depict it in a collaborative work of art.
- e) **Global peace-building:** National finalists from around the world participate in the international festival, where they discover that the forces that unite are deeper than those that divide, initiate lifelong friendships, learn universal values, and receive global leadership training.⁴

4 ICAF’s *ChildArt* magazine also develops the creative skills necessary for global peace-building. Published ad-free since 1998, *ChildArt* is a unique quarterly that promotes children’s creative development and cross-cultural cooperation through the arts. You can subscribe online at www.ChildArtGallery.org

5 To receive updates on the festivals and ICAF’s programs, you can subscribe to *Sketches*, a free monthly newsletter, by visiting www.icafe.org.

Conclusion

Under the Third Arts Olympiad, national and regional festivals will be held in 2006, building a momentum for the World Children’s Festival to be held on the National Mall in Washington, DC in 2007.⁵ In a world beset by conflicts and divisions, it is no longer sufficient to *promote* peace by showcasing the horrors of war or the benefits of peaceful resolution to conflicts. It is essential that we *create* peace through global programs for children such as the Arts Olympiad.