

Longtime peace advocate seeks to bring Season for Nonviolence flags to local schools



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Members of the Children for Change Club at W. T. Cooke Elementary School display the Season for Nonviolence flag at a celebration held at the Virginia Beach Little Theater in April.

"A Season for Nonviolence" was created in 1998 by Arun Gandhi, grandson of Mahatma Gandhi. Annually observed January 30 to April 4, the dates span the anniversaries of the deaths of Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.—two men who fought and died for a peaceful, nonviolent world.

The Season for Nonviolence is now observed in more than 900 cities in 67 countries, including the U. S. The annual celebration was introduced to Hampton Roads in 2003 by Herta Okonkwo, after retiring as a teacher of German at Princess Anne High School.

She has been promoting world peace since shortly after the end of World War II, when she was a teen in her native Germany. She has spearheaded numerous local annual Season for Nonviolence programs, most recently in April, featuring the Children for Change Club at W. T. Cooke Elementary School in Virginia Beach.

Currently she is campaigning to expand the spirit of the celebration into a year-round observance for children by raising the Season for Nonviolence flag outside schools—from the first day of school throughout the year.

"It is a symbol that nonviolence reigns, one school, one community, one city

throughout America," Mrs. Okonkwo stated. "It signifies that nonviolence is being achieved. It gives the youngsters knowledge, hope, power that a nonviolent lifestyle is achievable."

The flag would be raised only when no bullying or fighting had occurred. She believes that, as youngsters reach their school they will rejoice and cheer, "Our flag is still there."

The flag will serve as a triumphant sign, bearing witness that peace, freedom and justice can create a culture of harmonious diversity, compassion and mutual respect, Mrs. Okonkwo believes.

"History has proven that cultural change is possible. Nelson Mandela conquered apartheid. We are Americans, we can bring change. We are Americans: 'Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave.'"

She encourages educators, school administrators, PTA officials, and others interested in promoting peace to become involved in getting the flag for their schools.

Season for Nonviolence flags may be ordered at Vispronet: 877-822-0201. For more information or to discuss hosting an event: seasonofnonviolence.com or hsokonkwo@aol.com.