

The Interfaith Alliance – Long Island Chapter 2008 Annual Report

TIA-LI SPONSORED EVENTS DURING 2008

Stop the Hate Vigil: On January 20, TIA-LI co-sponsored a Stop the Hate vigil at Hofstra University in conjunction with the Long Island Alliance for Peaceful Alternatives and other organizations. The vigil included speeches by:

- Habeeb Ahmed, President of the Islamic Center of Long Island (and member of TIA-LI).
- Sergio Argueta, Executive Director of S.T.R.O.N.G., (Struggling to Reunite our New Generation), an organization dedicated to working with youth to prevent gang violence in Nassau County.
- Rabbi Moses Birnbaum, Past President of the LI Board of Rabbis.
- Frederick Brewington, Civil Rights Attorney.

The vigil resulted in two articles in Newsday and was later broadcast on Cablevision's public access channel. About 225 persons attended, and we obtained about 50 signatures for TIA's "First Freedom First" campaign.

Interfaith Luncheon: Approximately 75 persons attended TIA-LI Interfaith Luncheon held on May 22nd. Attendees included Jains, Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims, Jews, Christians, Quakers, and Unitarians.

Torture Awareness Campaign: At our April meeting, we hosted a viewing of the DVD *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, which is distributed by the National Religious Campaign Against Torture. As part of TIA-LI's attempt to raise awareness among young people of this important issue, we obtained about a dozen copies of the DVD and distributed them to religious organizations and school administrators at numerous college campuses in the area.

Iraqi Peace Group: At our October meeting, following a brief discussion on the three Abrahamic religions, we watched the DVD *Mesalla: Activists in Iraq*. This film tells the story of *LaOnf*, which is a network of Iraqi activists building a nonviolence movement to resist occupation, terrorism and corruption in Iraq.

We admired the local activists who are working under such dangerous conditions to bring peace and reconciliation to the various ethnic and religious groups facing stress and violence in their native land.

OTHER 2008 ACTIVITIES:

Outreach to Muslim Community: TIA-LI continued its efforts to build stronger bonds with the Muslim community on Long Island. As part of this effort, we undertook the following activities:

- **TIA-LI Meeting at Islamic Center of Long Island (ICLI):** This year we again held one of our monthly meetings at the ICLI. We are grateful for the opportunity to visit this beautiful mosque and feel more connected to our Muslim brothers and sisters when we do.
- **Iftar at the Islamic Center of Long Island:** Several TIA-LI members along with other community guests joined the members the Islamic Center of Long Island (ISLI), for a public Iftar celebration. Iftar is the daily post-sundown meal eaten by Muslims during the month of Ramadan, when no food or drink is consumed during daylight hours. As one of the speakers explained, Muslims believe that humans need food for both body and soul but tend to neglect the soul. Therefore, Ramadan is a time to focus on restoring that balance. In addition to enjoying a tasty meal and pleasant companionship in the large meeting hall, we were also invited into the worship space to observe the Muslim evening prayer.
- **Interfaith Service Award:** On behalf of TIA-LI, Chairman Rev. Mark Lukens accepted an award from the Islamic Center of Long Island (ICLI).
The “Interfaith Service Award” reads in part:
“In recognition for their efforts towards building bridges and promoting interfaith understanding and tolerance.”
We are most grateful for this high honor from our friends at the Islamic Center.

Hate Crimes: On the evening of November 14th, several TIA-LI members attended a candlelight vigil in memory of Marcelo Lucero, a 35 year old immigrant from Ecuador who was killed on November 8th in what authorities have labeled a hate crime. At our December meeting, members voted to cosponsor an “Evening for Marcelo’s Mom,” which was a fund raiser to support the victim’s family.

Drug Laws: We participated in a “Day of Advocacy” at the state capital in April in an effort to reform the draconian “Rockefeller Drug Laws” which have resulted in the long term imprisonment of thousands of non-violent, low-level drug users for the past 35 years. We are deeply concerned about the disproportionate number of Blacks and Latinos who have been incarcerated as a result of these laws.

WAR IN IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN:

- On March 19th, TIA-LI joined the Long Island Alliance for Peaceful Alternatives, Pax Christi Long Island, and other groups to demonstrate against the war in Iraq on the fifth anniversary of that war. The demonstration took place outside the entrance to a large regional shopping center.
- On October 15th, several TIA-LI members joined activists from numerous other progressive organizations outside the Hofstra University building where the final Presidential Debate was held. We listened to speakers supporting the *People’s Agenda*, which called for ending the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, restoring Constitutional rights, and reordering budget priorities to meet human needs. There were about 600 to 800 activists at its peak, including many members of Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW), and our chairperson Rev. Mark Lukens gave a rousing address.

- We also met with Congress members locally, as well as contacting them in their DC offices to speak out against continued funding for the war.
- We assisted the Long Island Alliance for Peaceful Alternatives in their petition drive, *“LI Clergy and Religious for Peace: A Call To End The War.”*

FINANCIAL SUPPORT PROVIDED TO OTHER GROUPS:

We provided financial support to the following organizations during the course of the year:

- **Interfaith Alliance Foundation** – to assist the National office with their financial problems.
- **CARECEN** – We purchased a journal ad to support this immigrant rights group.
- **LI Alliance for Peaceful Alternatives** – We purchased a journal ad to support this group, which coordinates activities among Long Island peace and justice organizations.
- **New Yorkers Against Gun Violence Education Fund (NYAGV)** – We contributed to this group’s annual fund raiser to support its efforts to combat violence caused by the illegal use of firearms.
- **Shepherd’s Singers** – We made a donation to this choir which sang at our annual Stop-the-Hate event.
- **S.T.R.O.N.G. Youth** – We made a donation to this group which held a Community Empowerment March Saturday, June 14th to bring attention to the devastation that violence causes to minority neighborhoods in Nassau County.
- **Greater Patchogue Foundation** – We made a donation to this organization, which is providing financial assistance to the family of Marcelo Lucero, the victim of a hate crime mentioned above.

ACTIONS IN CONJUNCTION WITH INTERFAITH ALLIANCE – NATIONAL:

We attended the National Leadership Meeting in April to discuss issues of concern with TIA staff as well as with fellow affiliate representatives. While there, we participated in TIA’s day of lobbying on Capitol Hill.