

## SEEDS OF PEACE

### **DONNA MULHEARN AND BEING A PILGRIM FOR PEACE**



*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace* (Prayer of St. Francis)

**Donna Mulhearn** is best known for her involvement in the human shield movement during the war with Iraq. Her actions then and wider commitments are however all part of her attempts to live out a contemplative life in the steps of Jesus, a life in which prayer and peace go hand in hand in whatever circumstances she finds herself. As she says:

*I breathe this prayer of St. Francis each time I go into meditation. I also prayed it on the streets of Baghdad during the war, outside a row of houses that had been blown to pieces. I prayed it feeling powerless, with bitter tears stinging my eyes and deep sadness in my heart. I screamed inside as I walked over puddles of blood to pick up a rag doll left in the debris.*

Like other witnesses for peace who stand with the victims of international violence, Donna therefore acts a seed of mercy, and, in unmasking the full horrors of war and power, a seed of vital truth.

#### **A contemplative in the midst of turmoil and violence**



Donna began her personal pilgrimage for peace in July 2002, when she lived for a time in a Buddhist nunnery in Tibet. Since then she has visited Iraq during war and occupation, as well as occupied Palestine (where she spent four months as a volunteer with the International Solidarity Movement) and Tibet. Using such experiences, as a former journalist and political adviser, she is now an effective independent writer and speaker on non-violence, spirituality and politics.

More than anything however, Donna is motivated by the tradition of non-violent action, and inspired by the radical Christian teaching of non-violence as a way of life. This involves the practice of Christian Meditation, an ancient spiritual tradition, also called the prayer of the heart, which has been revived in recent years through the teaching of the late John Main, a British Benedictine monk. Christian Meditation allows a person to connect with God within, through silence and stillness. It teaches the use of a mantra, or sacred word, to clear the mind of distractions. Meditation allows a person to 'be' in the present moment and over time to develop a deeper sense of self-awareness. John Main said: 'in meditation you know who you are because you are who you are'.

The contemplative tradition also respects wisdom from other spiritual traditions, and, in creating a heightened sense of love, compassion and justice thus leads to action. For as Donna says: '*Prayer and Peace. In Baghdad among the bombs, the blood, the grief, I learnt that these two things go hand in hand.*'

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### Human Shield in Iraq

*Do we now live in a world which believes that 'might is right'?*

*Do we solve differences between nations with bombs?*

*Do we respond to human rights abuses and the suffering they cause by inflicting more human rights abuses and more suffering? Do we allow the cycle of violence to continue?*

Responding to the call by Ken O'Keefe, a former US marine, calling on western volunteers to go to Baghdad to act as human shields in an effort to stop the impending war, Donna joined a group of international peace volunteers in Iraq in seeking to protect civilian sites such as water treatment plants and power stations. Subsequently, after the bombing of Baghdad in April 2003, her humanitarian work brought her into further danger, including constant bombing, being shot at by American soldiers, and kidnapped by local fighters: 'I was questioned about Australia's involvement in the war, about the current role of Australian soldiers and the views of Australians at home. They asked why Australia wants to hurt Iraqi people. I felt a great deal of shame about how blindly my Government follows the lead of the US in terms of foreign policy. As the bombing and gunfire continued around Fallujah, I realised that I was not the captive. These people were, the ones who are caught in this hellish situation'

### Our Home - Iraq

In order to undertake aid work in Iraq, a group of former human shields, including Donna, established 'Our Home - Iraq' as an independent organisation designed to carry out projects to assist children and families affected by the war. Its work has included setting up a shelter for street-kids in Baghdad and a centre for traumatised children. It is now supporting projects to assist refugee families made homeless by the war.



*Our Home - Iraq* continues to assist grassroots Iraqi organisations to run projects that support children and families throughout Iraq.

Peace Bird Art School in Al-Doura district of Baghdad is one such project, helping Iraqi children heal from trauma and reach their full potential through creative play therapy.

### Sharing the Truth

Donna's pilgrim witness has helped shed light on the suffering of the Iraqi people and of others, such as the Palestinians, whose voices and experience are rarely heard in the mainstream media demonstrations. As she encourages others:



*May the pursuit of truth be our motivation. It is a pure and honourable goal, far more fulfilling (and important) than fighting an election. Politics does not have the solution to our problems. The solution is personal. It's us. So despite what our Governments do (or don't do), may we continue*

*to be human beings and to care for our brothers and sisters hurting in Iraq. May we stay engaged, advocate and continue the journey with them.*

### Sources and more information:

[www.pilgrimstoryteller.com](http://www.pilgrimstoryteller.com)

[www.christianmeditationaustralia.org](http://www.christianmeditationaustralia.org)