

# **NORTHERN CALIFORNIA YOUTH HOLD ANTI-VIOLENCE YOUTH SUMMIT BY TERRANCE BOYKIN SAN FRANCISCO**

n Feb. 21, at the Oakland Zoo in Oakland, Calif., the Northern California youth division members celebrated their commitment to the Year of Victory in the Community with an Anti-Violence Youth Summit, designed to eliminate violence throughout the schools and neighborhoods of Oakland.

More than 100 concerned citizens attended “Unity in the Community: Stop the Violence Now.” The forum is the first in a series of discussion meetings, a collaborative effort involving SGI youth, The West Oakland Violence Prevention Project (WOVPP) and concerned members from the community in ongoing dialogues concerning the crippling effects of violence among individuals, families and communities in society. Young women’s leader Lisa Alley congratulated the Bay Area youth of Region One for their passion and commitment toward creating world peace with an excerpt from SGI President Ikeda’s poem “A Blue Deeper Than Indigo Itself.” She read: “Don’t ask / Whether or not this mighty flow of kosen-rufu / Will turn out to be a historical necessity. / Rather, always ask yourselves / Whether or not you carry the passion of heart / To make kosen-rufu inevitable, / Through your own sweat and toil.”

Under colorful banners that promoted the theme of peace and unity, Tamah Coleman introduced the importance of becoming aware of how violence starts and how it affects our lives: “It’s really encouraging that we are all here for the same purpose. I believe, there are three kinds of people in this world. There are those who make things happen, those who watch things happen, and those who wonder, what happened? Let us be the ones who make things happen in our community.”

The WOVPP provided a skit called “Effective Speaking,” which demonstrated how miscommunication is the root cause of violence among youth. After an insightful and memorable performance by Hanefa Olufemi, Jamell Graham and SGI member Brittany Dunning, the group provided an interactive segment, which allowed members of the audience to participate. The WOVPP is a grassroots organization with more than 12 years of experience in the areas of promoting students rights, mentoring, conflict resolution and communication skills among young people throughout the public schools. “We provide mediation forums within the public schools for two to 10 young people who may be involved in a conflict,” expressed Olufemi and Graham. “We always tell young people that yes, fighting is a choice, but it is not effective. It only leads to more violence.”

During the seminar young people were able to learn some interesting facts and gain suggestions for solutions to violence:

1. Intentional violence accounts for one-third of all injury deaths in the United States.
2. Intentional interpersonal violence disproportionately involves young people as both perpetrators and victims.
3. Five goals important to youth that may result in violence:
  - achieving and maintaining high status;
  - materialism and social identity;
  - power;

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- rough justice, social control, and self help; and
  - defiance of authority.
4. Successful solutions to violence among youth:
- Community-based methods for problem identification and development of solutions that apply to that population of youth.
  - Intervention.
  - Outreach/Education/information dissemination.
  - Identifying risk factors.
  - Establishing alternatives.

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