

**‘CREATING A CULTURE OF PEACE’ FESTIVAL CELEBRATES DIVERSITY
IN SAN FRANCISCO
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The aisles were clear and the room was dark. A single piece of blue paper bordered with white clouds floated on a current of air across the room and landed neatly on the auditorium’s floor. The Victory Over Violence youth summit at the Henry J. Kaiser Convention Center was over, but people were once again being summoned to the “Creating a Culture of Peace” festival in the San Francisco Bay Area. On Sept. 18, a coalition of more than 20 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) collaborated with the Northern California Youth Division of the SGI-USA to host the festival at the SGI San Francisco Culture Center. Presented as a continuation of the Victory Over Violence campaign and a celebration of the Hague Appeal for Peace, the festival was a vehicle to further propel the movement for a more peaceful world.

The morning festivities began with opening remarks from various NGO representatives followed by energetic performances from local artists that blew the crowd away. Linda Imperial with her soulful sound mixed with hip-hop beats and R&B flavor set a terrific tone for a show-stopping performance from the Young Women’s Taiko group.

The second half of the day consisted of workshops on issues ranging from nuclear disarmament to respecting and cherishing all people as individuals. The SGI-USA presented a workshop on Victory Over Violence, which included a presentation of a personal pledge for non-violence and small group discussions where members of the community shared their struggles and determinations toward overcoming the violence in their lives. “The Promise of World peace” hosted by the San Francisco Baha’i Community, focused on youth. One girl, of Latin decent, stated in video presentation, “It’s scary and exciting to be a Baha’i right now... We are the last ones to tell everyone about the Baha’i faith.” The Baha’i faith is supportive of a culture where everyone can be recognized as individuals as well as cherished and celebrated because of their individuality.

Among the keynote speakers for the day was the Honorable Le Tagaloa Pita, M.P, of Samoa, whose sincere and humanistic words conveyed the spirit of the festival. He said: “We have no preconceived ideas about who the authority comes from. The authority, it comes from you. Meaning you must stand up and make the change first with yourself, then in your community.” He went on to say, “The only way to create peace is to stop war,” and ended his remarks with an open invitation to host the first Global People’s Assembly in Samoa next year.

As the day’s festivities closed, everyone danced to the sounds of Orquestra Kalichin, a Latin Salsa band from the Mission recreation Center and the San Francisco Ikeda New Century Brass Band. Both performances furthered the unity of the festival’s 1000-plus participants through their music as people celebrated the success of the day. The essential theme emerged: You must make individual effort, change and liberate yourself before anything in your environment can or will reflect that. It was definitely a good way to bring organizations together to celebrate diversity.