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CITIZENS FOR PEACE
Minutes
January 8, 2008

The meeting opened at 7:00 pm with a welcome by President, Colleen Mills. She mentioned the recent front-page Livonia Observer article featuring our guest speaker, Rudy Simons, and the Citizens for Peace. She then introduced Rudy to the group.

Special Presentation:

Rudy Simons serves on the Board of the Michigan Coalition for Human Rights. He traveled to Iran, for two weeks in March of 2007, with 23 Americans from all over the United States. They were members of the Fellowship for Reconciliation (FFR), an International group, established in 1914, based in New York. FFR is one of the few groups granted visas to Iran. The group, comprised of 14 women and 9 men, studied and read about Iran for months prior to the trip. As there are no American flights to Iran, the group flew in from London. They were provided an air-conditioned bus for their travels.

When it comes to travel, the U.S. was granted only 300 visas for Iran. Three FFR delegations represent a quarter of that number. By comparison, for the same year there have been 60,000 German visas issued and many more for other countries. This disparity is dangerous because when people don't get together, fear follows.

Rudy said the best part of the trip was their ability to meet with individual Iranians who happened to cross their path. English is their second language, so most people could converse very well. The group spoke to several students, clerics and a Dean of a University. They went to two Armenian Christian churches and an Orthodox Synagogue. They also met with Iranian V.P. Ashi, who is one of four Vice Presidents. It is interesting to note that 70% of the Iranian population is under 30 years of age and many have been to war.

Iran was known as Persia until the 1930s, when the first Shah ordered that the name be changed. They speak the language of Farsi. Fars is Arabic for Persian. Farsi is written in Arabic, but it is not the Arabic language. We think Iran has a very closed society, but that is not the case. There is no music or dancing in public and in the movies. The U.S. women had to wear a scarf and lightweight cover over their clothes while in public. However, tens of thousands of women are cited and arrested for inappropriate dress. Rudy pointed out that as the beating drums of war have gotten closer, the society has become more strict. Theocracy is the highest order of their society.

Rudy said Iran is a very beautiful country. Tehran, a city of 7 million people, is a very modern city with a mountain range. The northern region is very affluent. Driving through there reminded Rudy of mid-town Manhattan. People needed to cross the street en masse just to be seen. They also visited Shiraz, in the south, the city of love, poetry and wine. Although Muslims may not drink alcohol there, they still grow the grape seeds for other countries to produce the famous Shiraz wine. While there they visited beautiful gardens that were shrines to two of their famous poets. The people take poetry seriously. The most famous Iranian poet was Omar Kayam. The gardens are the only place where couples may hold hands in public.

Other cities the group visited were Persepolis – the ancient city of the rulers of the Great Empire, which celebrated its 2500 year anniversary in the 1970s; Isfahan – famous for its beautiful carpets and Qom – a city dedicated to the teaching and promulgation of religion. There are 150,000 students at Islamic Universities. It takes 10 to 20 years of learning to get to wear a white turban or to be called Ayatollah. Rudy said those wearing black turbans are presumed to be descendants of Mohammed.

Rudy said many of the people he spoke to criticized their President. However they did not speak of their Supreme Leader – or of ours! They felt they are entitled to nuclear power, but they do not wish to have nuclear weapons and have signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Agreement. The IAEA Head is meeting in Iran again and says Iran is following the requirements of the agreement. The U.S. Gov't is sending out a different message.

Rudy expressed the need for us to persuade Congress to start opening channels of communication with Iran, just as was done with China some years earlier. Their leaders have tried to contact our President but are not taken seriously. What needs to happen is to have an exchange of students, athletes, etc., as well as cultural exchanges. This type of communication would be so beneficial. When people get to know each other they are less likely to want to kill each other. We need to write letters to Congress to encourage this type of exchange.

A war with Iran would be devastating beyond belief. Oil would be cut off in the Strait of Hormuz. It would endanger the Israelis living there (25,000 – 37,000), the Emirates and the U.S. would not go unscathed. We have three aircraft carriers in suspect locations in the Persian Gulf. Adm. William Fallon, the Head of the U.S. Military forces in the Middle East is doing aerial exercises, but states there will be no attack while on his watch. Rudy said our Presidential candidates leave much to be desired in enhancing our relations with Iran. Rudy suspects that Obama, Kucinich and Edwards would be open to communication with Iran. Rudy again stressed we must make our voices heard!

A question and answer session followed. Afterward, Colleen thanked Rudy for sharing his experiences. He was given big applause from the group.

Announcements:

- Rep. Dennis Kucinich is in town to talk about the Department of Peace and Nonviolence on Jan. 12th at Unity of Livonia. We are so lucky that he found time in his schedule to speak to us!
- Colleen announced our new Board members: Dottie Ochala, Organizational Director; Clara Lawrence, Political Director and Pat Van Vuren, our Fund Raising Director. All members were approved with a unanimous hand vote.
- Colleen is looking for volunteers to work a DoP table in Milford at a MLK Jr. Observance.

Treasurer's Report:

- Rick Abdoos has compiled a budget for the New Year. He said we were close to our budget for last year. Essentially we are doing fine. He distributed copies of the Treasurer's report for review by the group.

Guests:

Tom Spencer, who is challenging Thaddeus McCotter for the 11th district U.S. Congressional seat, spoke to the group about his background and campaign. He fully supports the Department of Peace campaign. He also said the war in Iraq is immoral and that he is disappointed in Congress for not ending it. He has a son returning to Iraq for the third time.

A representative from the Ron Paul Presidential campaign had some information to share with the group. She said he has been against the war from the onset. He is also against the Patriot Act. He does support efforts in diplomacy.

Colleen shared her mantra for the year: "My choices are creating the me I will be!" She thanked all for coming.

The meeting closed at 9:15 pm.