



OPEN LETTER TO THE NEXT PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

As we all know, Sunday is the 15th anniversary of the worst terrorist attack on our nation. However, 60 years ago on September 11 in Washington, DC, President Dwight Eisenhower started a movement that should be celebrated and shared with everyone. He brought together 40 representatives of government, industry, business, labor unions, education, law, and medicine to discuss the “most worthwhile purpose there is in the world today: to help build the road to peace, to help build the road to an enduring peace.”

President Eisenhower went on to state the following at the White House Conference on Citizen Diplomacy: *“Every bomb we can manufacture, every plane, every ship, every gun, in the long run has no purpose but the negative: to give us time to prevent the other fellow from starting a war, since we know we won’t. The billions we pour into that ought to be supported by a great American effort, a positive, constructive effort that leads directly toward what we all want: a true and lasting peace...I am talking about the exchange of professors and students and executives, the providing of technical assistance, and of the ordinary traveler abroad. I am talking about doctors helping in the conquering of disease...if we are going to take advantage of the assumption that all people want peace, then the problem is for people to get together and to leap governments, if necessary to evade governments – to work out not one method but thousands of methods by which people can gradually learn a little bit more of each other.”*

He told delegates that *“Two deeply held convictions unite us in common purpose. First is our belief in effective and responsive local government as a principal bulwark of freedom. Second is our faith in the great promise of people-to-people and sister city affiliations in helping build the solid structure of world peace.”*

With the majority of the world’s population living in cities, Eisenhower dreamed of a program that would facilitate the creation of links between people of one city to another, so friendships could be established. Through exchanges and cooperative activities, he reasoned that people from different cultures could celebrate and appreciate their differences, as well as develop mutually beneficial relationships that would lessen the likelihood of misunderstanding and war.

Behind all those signs you drive past and the displays in airports proclaiming a community’s sister cities, there is a grassroots worldwide effort to engage citizens in promoting peace and through mutual respect, cooperation, and understanding. Currently, 570 communities have 2300 partnerships in 150 countries with approximately 1.1 million people involved across the globe.

As President Obama went to visit Japan recently, many older Americans remembered that terrible day more than 70 years ago when President Roosevelt announced that Pearl Harbor had been attacked and that we were going to war. Japanese residents were brought out of their homes and sent to internment camps. Hitler was racing through Europe and intent on Germany becoming the world’s most powerful nation. After the war was over, our President, a former military commander during World War II, asked Americans to hold out our hands in friendship.

Today, years later, Japan and Germany are two of our strongest allies.

This happened not just because we helped to rebuild these countries, but also through programs like Sister Cities International, the Fulbright Scholars program, People-to-People International, and the Peace Corps, to educate Americans and folks around the world that the majority of people want the same basic things – a better life for their families, an opportunity to be productive, and a peaceful world.

Ms. or Mr. President, there is something else you can take from this program. When John F. Kennedy became president, he asked General Eisenhower to head all the U.S. People-to-People programs. At a press conference on November 8,



1961, President Kennedy said, *"I am delighted to announce that General Eisenhower has agreed to serve as the Chairman of the Board of Trustees. The purpose of the organization will be to foster contacts between citizens of the United States and people of other lands in every way possible."* Since that time and because of the leadership of these two men, every President of the United States has been the Honorary Chair of Sister Cities International.

On behalf of Sister Cities International, I welcome you to this prestigious leadership group of Presidents that have been involved in this movement – Dwight Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, Richard Nixon, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama and look forward to working with you to continue our mission of promoting peace through mutual respect, understanding and cooperation – one individual, one community at a time.

Sincerely,

Mary D. Kane
President and CEO
Sister Cities International