

Diversity Working Group (DWG) Minutes

The DWG met by conference call on Sunday, December 18, 2005, at 7:30 p.m., Eastern Standard Time.

Present: Cortez Rainey, Chair; Dan Hessey; Sarah LittleFeather; and new member Maggie Scott.

Absent: Hamish Maclaren, Lodro Rinzler, Babo Harrison, Shawn Wheeler, Veronica Guzman, Maria Vargas, Kai Yee, Martine Remondin, Pearl Ubugen, and David Fraioli.

Many of these individuals could not participate because of the relatively short meeting notice and/or because of other responsibilities they have as directors of major Shambhala Centers (e.g., New York City, Boston, etc.) or as staff of Shambhala Mountain Center's Winter dathun.

Diversity Initiatives – report on:

Following introductions, Cortez explained that this meeting would be a little different from previous ones in that he would present all the diversity developments that have occurred since December 2004, when it submitted the document entitled *Recommendations for Improving Diversity and Accessibility in Shambhala*.

1. In February, 2005, the Second Shambhala Congress made a compilation of responses to the *Practitioner Survey* that took place from October to November, 2004 available to Congress attendees. In addition, attendees received two other documents: *Recommendations for Improving Diversity and Accessibility in Shambhala* and the *Diversity Resource Manual*.

Center/Group leaders were asked to (a) designate a diversity contact person at their local centres; and (b) to pick at least one diversity recommendation to implement. Cortez said he is aware of only four Centers/groups that have actually done either.

Dan suggested that we follow up with a friendly reminder which would underscore the fact that the Sakyong's Council supports the working group's diversity initiatives specifically and the concept of raising awareness of diversity issues generally. He suggested that as the sangha establishes a relationship with the new governance structures, there would be greater responsiveness. Maggie asked that Cortez follow up with the Sakyong's Council at their conference call on December 19, 2005 about the low response of Centers/Groups and that we clarify exactly what the role of the diversity contact person is.

2. The Sakyong's Council met on February 18, 2005 and issued a statement of commitment entitled *Statement on Diversity and Inclusiveness*. President Reoch appointed Hamish Maclaren to the Sakyong's Council as Coordinator of the Accessibility Working Group. As a result, the Diversity and Accessibility Working Group is now

divided into two separate working groups.

3. In April, the President traveled to Baltimore for the Mid-Atlantic Regional Congress. He hosted an elegant dinner on May 27, 2005 to acknowledge and celebrate the racial and ethnic diversity in the Mid-Atlantic Region specifically and racial and ethnic diversity that exists in the Mandala in general. Cortez reported that more than 25 dinner guests were very much aware that this was a "first" in Shambhala, and felt honored by President Reoch's gesture. Cortez said he has received a similar response from persons who read the Shambhala News Service bulletin of June 16, 2005 and *The Dot* article concerning the event.

4. In their meeting in Boston of April 29 – May 1, 2005, the Sakyong's Council reviewed the Diversity recommendations first presented at the Mandala Governing Council meeting in Boston, December, 2004. Of note, the council agreed on the need for diversity training at all levels of the Mandala and decided that such training should begin with the main governing bodies. Dan said that we don't want diversity issues to be seen as only of concern to a small "interest group," but to make awareness of diversity an integral part of everything we do. Dan suggested that in dathuns and group practice we could build a contemplation exercise around the Four Immeasurables and integrate exploration of diversity issues into our curricula. Cortez noted that the Sakyong fully supports the entire range of diversity initiatives. In fact, President Reoch had requested a contemplation around diversity for use during the Shambhala Mountain Center winter dathun and talked about integrating diversity awareness in a non-intrusive way. Dan said we need to communicate to people that multicultural inclusion is a part of what we do, and that dharma is not just for those who are "free and well favored." We need to encourage practitioners to open their minds to people, cultures and styles that they don't understand, in short, to emerge from our cocoons.

5. At their meeting of April 29 – May 1, 2005 in Boston, the Sakyong's Council agreed to develop a diversity statement, *Aspirations on Diversity, Accessibility and Compassionate Care*, as a companion document to the *Shambhala Care and Conduct* policy, in consultation with the Mandala Governing Council. On October 24, 2005 President Reoch sent this statement to all centre directors for comment. Maggie expressed concern that the "Aspirations" statement is only on display in a maximum of four Shambhala Centers that we know about. Cortez was asked to follow up with President Reoch regarding the status of the Aspirations statement at the meeting of the Sakyong's Council on December 19, 2005. (In response to this question, Cortez received a reply from the President indicating that all center directors had been sent the draft in the first week of December, 2005 to see if they had any comments or questions about it. The formal document has now been printed and is being sent to all centers.)

6. On August 17, 2005 at Shambhala Mountain Center, the Sakyong's Council and Mandala Council (Center Directors) participated in a half-day diversity training exercise called "Going Beyond Bias" developed by Sangyum Agness Au, Hamish Maclaren (chair of Accessibility Working Group), Mary Whetsell (chair of Membership Committee) and Cortez, in consultation with Chuck Whetsell, who is a diversity training facilitator. A

questionnaire eliciting feedback on the training exercise was sent to the participants. The initial response was that the training exercise was beneficial.

Cortez also reported that an article concerning the training was submitted to *The Dot*, but that because of space constraints the publication is unable to include the article in its January, 2006 issue, but that the editor had asked that we provide a longer article from a different perspective later. Maggie said that in her view this was a sad irony, if you look at it on a psychological level, i.e. she wondered if the space constraints were an indication that there may not be psychological room right now for "going beyond bias." The "Going Beyond Bias" training took place in August. It is now December. And possibly very few in the worldwide sangha know about it. She suggested that if awareness of diversity initiatives is going to grow in the sangha, then we need to publicize these initiatives in a timely manner. Sarah suggested that Cortez write a letter to the editor to express the working group's dissatisfaction with *The Dot* editor's decision – notwithstanding the editor's suggestion that we provide a longer article from a different perspective later. We have also lost an opportunity to let the community know that the Sakyong's Council and center directors support diversity initiatives.

(In response to the above discussion, a letter was written to *The Dot*. Editor Laurie Bodley responded that her decision not to run the diversity training article in the winter 2006 issue of *The Dot* had absolutely nothing to do with her lacking the psychological space to support the important work that the Diversity Working Group is doing. Laurie supports our efforts and believes strongly that our work is very important for the Shambhala community. Laurie simply wanted a re-write by a person not directly involved in developing the training program, preferably a participant from the SMC workshop, to offer outside perspective and an experiential account of the workshop. This is part of *The Dot's* not-so-new policy to try to run articles that are more newsworthy and less promotional in order to increase readership. As the sole person working on *The Dot's* editorial content, Laurie can not always turn around story submissions that need work in time for the issue in progress. Laurie indicated she'd be happy to talk to Diversity Working Group members and offered to help locate a writer who can write an article on the "Going Beyond Bias" training for inclusion in the Spring issue of *The Dot*.)

7. In October, 2005, during a speaking engagement in London, England to promote the Sakyong's participation in the New York marathon and the accompanying fund-raiser to reduce Shambhala's debt, Gesar Mukpo stated that acceptance of diversity is vital for the health of Shambhala and that we need to hire a full-time diversity coordinator who can co-ordinate all the diversity initiatives of our international Mandala. That has not happened yet as we didn't do as well as expected in the Sakyong's marathon fundraiser. There is still a shortage of funding, and that in many areas we rely on volunteer efforts in the various working groups.

Communication – importance of:

Cortez said that in his opinion each member of the Sakyong's Council is unquestionably committed to improving awareness of diversity issues in Shambhala. Sarah expressed concern, however, about the lack of on-going communication about developments in the

area of diversity and said that people who have an interest in these issues don't know what is going on and that at minimum there should be a periodic update posted on Sangha-Announce.

Website – development of:

Cortez announced that the Mandala Council plans to create a new Shambhala website. The website will include a diversity webpage. As part of that project, the DWG has been asked to obtain diversity photos so the images can be included in the page design and made available on the website for use by centers throughout the Mandala for diversity, outreach and marketing materials. He said he'd like to set up a select committee to develop and collect content for the diversity webpage. Dan said that we need a diversity logo, that branding is an important concept, one that we should consider if we hope to have the rest of the sangha take these issues seriously.

E-mail Account – setting up of:

Maggie proposed the working group establish a new listserv: Diversity-Talk, similar to Karuna-Talk. But whereas the latter is for people with physical and mental disabilities, Diversity-Talk could be a forum for grassroots discussion on issues such as age, gender, sexual orientation, race, etc. Maggie and Sarah suggested that Cortez contact Alan Sloan, moderator of Karuna-Talk, to determine what is involved in setting up such a listserv.

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m. Eastern time. Therefore, there was no time to discuss the other two agenda items: the publication of a status report on the state of diversity in Shambhala since the submission the working group's recommendations a year ago, and the need to recruit new members of the working group.