

# Role Models of Peacemakers

by Dawn Shirk

What is peace? Who can we look to as role models in the quest for peace in our homes, our communities, and our world? What groups or organizations are working today to promote peace? Let's explore these questions as we look at a few past and present leaders in the movement toward peace and think about the role that *we* can play in creating peace.



*Rigoberta Menchu Tum, Guatemala.*

## Rigoberta Menchu

In 1959, Rigoberta Menchu was born into the indigenous Quiche community of Chimel, Guatemala. Her family had a small plot of land on which they grew beans and corn. In order to survive, everyone, including the children, had to work on the large plantations owned by a few very wealthy families whose ancestors came from Europe. Her father was among the first in their region to fight for a better life for their people and to protest the conditions in which the indigenous people were forced to exist. Her father, mother, and brother were all eventually tortured and killed for their participation in such movements. Rigoberta Menchu educated herself and became involved in movements for reform. As early as age 16, she became involved in the women's rights movement. After the death of her family, she continued their work as a labor rights, women's rights, human rights, and peace activist. She won the Nobel Prize in 1992, becoming the first indigenous person and the youngest to win this prize.

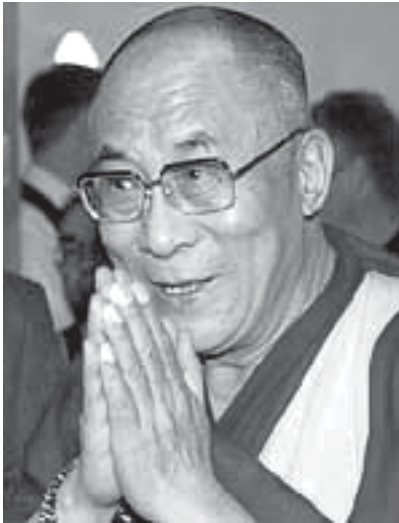
## Jimmy Carter

Jimmy Carter was the 29<sup>th</sup> president of the United States. While in office, he was responsible for several important treaties, including the Panama Canal treaties, a peace treaty between Egypt and Israel, and the SALT II treaty with the Soviet Union. After his time as president, he continued his work for peace, justice and human rights. He founded the Carter Center, a non-profit organization which is committed to advancing human rights and alleviating unnecessary human suffering through: international peacemaking; promoting democracy; disease control and prevention programs; and championing mental health issues.

Through this center, President Carter has been actively involved in helping to promote peace in Ethiopia, North Korea, Liberia, Haiti, Bosnia, Sudan, and Venezuela. In the U.S., Carter works with Habitat for Humanity helping to build houses for those who most need them.



*Jimmy Carter, United States.*



*Tenzin Gyatso, the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, Tibet.*

### **The Dalai Lama**

The Dalai Lama is the spiritual leader of the Tibetan people. He became the full political leader of Tibet at the age of 16. In 1959 when he was 25, he was exiled from his country as the Chinese government occupied Tibet. He has since lived in India. The Dalai Lama has devoted his life to the freedom of Tibet through peaceful measures. He created the Five-Point Peace Plan, which lays out a plan for Tibet to regain its freedom, restore human rights, stop China from using Tibet as a site for nuclear weapons production and waste disposal, and to designate Tibet as a 'zone of peace'. He has worked with many world religious leaders in the search for peace, including the late Pope John Paul II. During a press conference with the Pope, he said of finding peace, "We live in a period of great crisis, a period of troubling world developments. It is not possible to find peace in the soul without security and harmony between the people." He believes that the problems of today, whether they be local or global, cannot be solved in isolation. People need to work toward an understanding of each other, to feel others' suffering, in order to make a peaceful world.

### **Helen Caldicott**

Helen Caldicott is a medical doctor and one of the world's best-known antinuclear activists. When she was studying medicine, she learned about the effects that radiation can have on people, including the development of cancer and birth defects. When she discovered that the French had been exploding nuclear weapons over the Pacific Atoll of Mururoa, a French colony in the South Pacific, she began writing letters to local newspapers to expose the dangers of radiation. Eventually, she became the leader of the Australian movement against these nuclear tests. She then began a global campaign for antinuclear awareness by founding and heading a worldwide group of 24,000 health professionals and concerned citizens called the Physicians for Social Responsibility, committed to the elimination of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction, the achievement of a sustainable environment, and the reduction of violence and its causes. She has devoted her life to educating people in her homeland and around the world about how to make these possibilities a reality.



*Helen Caldicott, Australia.*

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