International House NY  
Tenzin Chemey  
*Youth Ambassador of the Peace Program (YAPP)*  
Leh, Ladakh, India

In the year 1959, when a large number of Tibetans came into exile in India, the Indian government allowed the Tibetan refugees to live in the country. India currently hosts around 60,000 Tibetans in about 40 Tibetan refugee settlements in different parts of India. Sonamling Tibetan refugee settlement in Leh, Ladakh is the second-largest Tibetan settlement with around 7,000 refugees in 12 camps in addition to the nomadic camps in the border region of South Eastern Ladakh, India.

In recent years, there have been incidents of conflicts between the residents of Tibetan refugee settlement and the Ladakhis (members of the host community). In 2019, a youth died in a fight that broke out between a group of Tibetans and Ladakhi youths. A similar incident took place in a local educational institution where a senior Tibetan monk teacher was murdered by a group of Ladakhi youth who were his students.

There are multiple reasons for such resentment against each other one of which is the feeling of otherness. The lack of programs focusing on building peace and understanding between these two communities not only normalize the existing conflict, but also exacerbates the situation beyond repair.

The Youth Ambassador for Peace program (YAPP) aims to educate the youth of both communities (Sonamling Tibetan refugees and the Ladakhis) on the common ethnic, historical and religious backgrounds and bridge the gap by creating a better understanding of the “other’s” perspective irrespective of their differences in political identity.

The proposed YAPP will organize a week-long summer camp for 20 Tibetan and Ladakhi youth (10 from each community). The age group of the participants will be from 18-30 years. The summer camp will be a gender inclusive one where we will focus on bringing onboard equal representation of all gender. In this summer camp, the following activities will be carried out:

- A guided-tour of cultural, traditional heritage centres and educational institutions of both the communities.
- Capacity building workshops on conflict resolution and peacebuilding measures.
- Exchange home-stay experiences introducing each other’s culture.
- Interactive sessions with resource persons focusing on shared cultural heritage and historical backgrounds.
- Activities to introduce culture, history, language, tradition, etc. of the two communities through art and theatre.

Through YAPP, we hope to build a network of youth ambassadors for peace through whom, we aspire to educate and encourage the larger number of members of both the communities to understand and communicate better and work together in building a sustainable peace. The guided tour of cultural, traditional heritage centres and educational institutions of both communities will help the participants learn the background of the other community and understand each other’s mentality better.

Workshops on effective methods on conflict resolution and ways of peacebuilding will equip and strengthen the participants’ knowledge and boost confidence as they go out in the community to work and educate the other respective members. Exchange home-stay experiences will enable the participants to have a closer look at each other’s life style and build long-term personal connections. Interactive sessions with resource persons will focus on bringing a realization on sense of belonging to a shared cultural heritage and historical backgrounds.
Knowledge and attitude surveys before and after the YAPP will be used as an indicator to measure success of the program. The number of networks created by each participant after the YAPP will also indicate the success of the program.

Owing to the many restrictions and lot of uncertainties due to COVID-19 concerns, we are keeping some alternative ways to implement the project including but not restricted to, holding webinars, splitting the total number of participants into smaller groups while conducting the educational tours and workshop activities.