

About Rita Marie Johnson



After learning that Costa Rica did not have an army, Rita Marie Johnson moved from the US to Costa Rica almost 15 years ago to help strengthen its peace model. She currently serves as director of the Rasur Foundation, which she founded in 1997 to inspire and educate toward a culture of peace in Costa Rica.

In 2006, Rita Marie wrote a Ministry for Peace initiative that was embraced by Costa Rica's current president, Oscar Arias, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate. The Ministry for Peace bill has no opposition and is now in the final process before coming to vote before the Legislative Assembly. Rita Marie was authorized by the Vice President of Costa Rica to represent Costa Rica at the Summit of the Global Alliance for

Ministries and Departments for Peace that took place in Japan in September 2007.

In 2002, Johnson discovered the synergy between two methods, HeartMath for "feeling peace" and Nonviolent Communication for "speaking peace". This combination, now known as *BePeace*, inspired her to found the Academy for Peace of Costa Rica (APCR) in 2003 with the aim of citizens passing this skill from generation to generation. By 2005, the APCR had won the *Changemakers Innovation Award*, chosen from 79 projects in 32 countries. This year the APCR will work in all the public schools in two counties and will finalize a plan to upscale to the national level. In addition, the APCR will respond to invitations from five Central American countries for training in *BePeace*.

Johnson served the UN University for Peace in Costa Rica from 1999-2002. In 2000, Johnson's book, *The Return of Rasur: The story that offers an answer to education in our time* was published, which led her to producing the musical *Rasur*, and writing its libretto. The musical was based on the poem *Rasur*, written by Roberto Brenes Mesén in 1946, that predicted Costa Rica would become a model of peace. *Rasur* was decreed a cultural event of national interest by the President and was performed at Costa Rica's largest theatre.

As an international peacemaker, Johnson has presented workshops in the US, Europe and Central America. In November 2006, she completed a speaking tour in Japan on Costa Rica as a model of peace. In July 2007, she served on the plenary panel, "Women of Power" at the *International Women's Peace Conference* in Dallas. In September 2007, she was the keynote speaker for the World Day of Prayer at Unity Village, Missouri.

Johnson holds a B.A. in Psychology from the University of Missouri. In the 80s, Johnson served as Chief of Volunteer Services at the Texas Department of Health and initiated the Texas Senior Volunteer Conference and Texas Senior Games. The Governor of Texas presented her with an *Outstanding Leadership* award for this work.

Rita Marie and her husband, Rev. Juan Enrique Toro, introduced the UN-sponsored educational campaign, *The Season for Nonviolence*, to Costa Rica, which is now sponsored by governmental ministries each year. In 2002, the couple purchased a 2-acre property as headquarters for the Rasur Foundation. The people who live and work there strive to practice *BePeace* in each moment so that an authentic culture of peace can be experienced. For further information, contact ritamarie@rasurfoundation.org