

**Human Rights Commission**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**April 9, 2008**  
**7:30 PM in the Newton City Hall cafeteria**

**Attendance:**

Commissioners present: Jane Brown, Peter Brown, Muriel Esdale, Marianne Ferguson (Chair), Judy Fischbach  
Brenda Krasnow, Sheila Mondschein, Sona Petrossian, Susan Thomas  
Commissioner absent/regrets: (all were present)

Advisory Council Members present: Lt. Bruce Apotheker, Dianne Chilingerian, Ann Capoccia, Homer Franck,  
Sam Glass, Nazik Kazimi, Norman Lazarus, Viviane Planine, David Rosen, Armando Rossi, Joan Rubin,  
Sharon O. Stout, Frank Wolpe

Advisory Council Members absent/regrets: Carol Y. Kelley, Matt McBride, Carleton Merrill, Myrna Offen

Students present: Julijana Englander, David Fisher

Students regrets: Ali Zaidi, Isaac Zarsky

Staff present: Beverly Droz

Guests: (none)

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**The meeting opened** at 7:35 pm

Everyone was welcomed and introductions were made around the room.

The minutes of the March 12, 2008 meeting were approved and accepted, with 2 small corrections: the spelling of Jenna-6 and that all HRC members should serve on at least one committee.

**School Updates:**

**Newton South High School:**

Viviana Planine reported:

- Days of Remembrance is going very well. Series of events, talks and films on Sudan, Dafur, Armenia and Bosnia as well as professors from Brandeis discussing the issues surrounding genocide.
- Social Awareness showed the film "Winter's Soldier."
- Silver Ribbon Day is 4/18
- Freedom from Chemical Dependency was April 4, a series of workshops on issues with drugs and alcohol, sponsored by the Newton Youth Commission
- NSHS will be a project site for NewtonSERVES on April 13.

**Newton North High School:**

Julijana Englander reported:

- Days of Remembrance presentations were 4/8, 4/15 & 17. Julijana attended and said they were excellent.
- Ali and other NNHS students are in New Orleans for Katrina clean up work.
- They are also holding a blood drive.

Sona congratulated the students for all their help at both high schools. She mentioned the call 1-800-Genocide # and other actions people can take to help end genocide in Darfur.

- By calling 1800-Genocide you can ask President Bush to stick to his promise for Sudan Accountability
- [www.genocideintervention.net/page/join\\_our\\_rapid\\_response\\_network](http://www.genocideintervention.net/page/join_our_rapid_response_network)

Brenda said this program has grown because of the students and all of the HRC congratulated them!

**Hate Crimes/Incidents**

Lt. Bruce Apotheker reported:

- Lexington School Superintendent is a Newton resident and was targeted due to school curriculum in Lexington by [www.HalTurnershow.com](http://www.HalTurnershow.com) which advocates harm to the superintendent.
- 4/7/08 FA Day Jr. High reported graffiti vandalism but they started to wash it off before the police arrived so he has not yet sent a report to Bev yet. He reminded all that these things need to be photographed before being removed.

- 4/4/08 at 12 Brookside Ave: A man had broken a patio table. The issue was not hate for Russian ethnic background of neighbors and won't be classified as a hate crime.
- 4/8/08 at 15 Otis St: A couple thought neighbors were harassing them because of their sexual orientation but interviewing all determined a misunderstanding. The case is will not be investigated further.
- A high school student complained that the driver of a jeep insulted her due to her race. But the student she was with contradicts the story. They are looking into it further.

Lt. Bruce Apotheker answered questions that member had. The Hal Turner website is considered free speech, since he is not making a direct threat.

### **COMMITTEE REPORTS:**

The letter of resignation from Marcia Cruz Redding from 4/8/08 was read and accepted with sadness and appreciation for the contributions she has made.

#### **Membership:**

- Muriel mentioned that Bev is running NewtonSERVES and invited members to join Muriel on an afternoon project. Jane agreed and others will consider.
- David Fisher has invited students to the May meeting.

**Fair Housing:** No report.

#### **Program:**

- Brenda said we'll discuss Israeli / Palestine issues in "other business" so we can brainstorm ideas together. She said Bullying is another issue.
- Brenda met with Tim Neuman- a previous student who would like to come address the HRC.
- Susan reported that they are exploring a program on conflict. They have some resources from Brandies University on co-existence and conflict.
- Judy mentioned that they're looking at conflict resolution rather than just conflict. She is exploring different films. She also urged all members to serve on a committee.
- Mickey mentioned an ongoing program on Arab-Israeli relations that has an approach from various points of view.

#### **Education:**

Sona was brief about Days of Remembrance exhibits in the high schools since reports were given by the schools. We'd like to broaden the event to include Native Americans.

Frank mentioned George Clooney's movie on Darfur and Marianne said it would be good to view such a movie.

**Communications:** Susan reviewed the website and has been in touch with Bev. Some changes were made.

**MAHRC:** Peter reported briefly on the last meeting.

#### **Multi-Cultural:**

Marianne stated that with Marcia's resignation that we need to find a new chair or co-chair for this committee.

#### **Newton Clergy Association:**

Sam reported on the upcoming Mayor's Community Prayer Breakfast on 5/21/08. Sam said at the last meeting the NCA discussed racism and determined that they'll take it up in front of their individual congregations.

The NCA intends to sponsor a 3-part series on religious diversity in Newton at the Newton Library for fall 2008. Tonight the NCS is showing "Mixed Blessings: a film about interfaith families".

### **NEW BUSINESS:**

- Jane reported on the Woman's Commission's "Women Speak OUT". They had the 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting in West Newton last night with 10 young women, some of whom did not speak English. These women would like a course on managing money. She gave unnamed examples of their plights. The HRC has been a co-sponsor of this series, and Bev's division and their social worker has been involved.
- Jane reported on a 4/20/08 meeting in Watertown co-sponsored by many peace groups who addressed issues of peace between Israel and Palestine. She had taken notes and gave them to Bev for our office files. Jane has also contacted the American Friends Service Committee and found further resources.

## **DISCUSSION ISSUES:**

### **Israeli - Palestinian issue**

Brenda said that the Program Committee feels stuck on how to proceed with speakers and a follow-up program on the Israeli - Palestinian issue which is very complex. Sheila said she liked the idea of focusing on conflict resolution. She mentioned a speaker at Harvard. We should focus on the dialogue, and not so much on the history which evokes heated debate from different sides.

Dave Rosen was concerned that the resource list handed out was 1-sided. There was discussion but members felt it had balanced items on it. Marianne reminded everyone that we're trying to think and work through program ideas for a complex issue.

Susan brought the book "The Lemon Trees" by Sandy Tolan. He's speaking on 5/13/08 at the YMCA in Cambridge and Susan's going. Nazik had sent "The Lemon Trees" notice and spoke to the fact that we have to be open to sitting and talking and hearing different ideas. Brenda agreed to that this is our goal.

Frank said he has run many conference and you need a theme/topic to focus the discussion. He suggested we ask the speakers to talk about "Who wants Peace?" and not to deviate from that topic. Viviana said the topic is relevant to Newton. There issues are in our backyard and it is our responsibility as a HRC to address it. David F said it is an issue of semantics, because everyone wants peace. Mickey suggested "How do we find the Highway to Peace for Israeli-Palestinians"? He feels there are good speakers at Brandeis.

The Seeds of Peace was mentioned but after 6 years, follow-up has shown that the children became polarized as they grew into adults. There was further discussion. Marianne suggested having a group read "The Lemon Trees" and discuss it.

Homer suggested a factual update type program. Ann C said she runs conferences with young adults ages 16-25 who express their ideas about an issue. Given the number of colleges around us, maybe we could, have young people discuss it. We would need to talk with someone who could facilitate it, and look at what would be the best mix. This could focus on conflict resolution.

Brenda thanked everyone for their ideas.

## **OTHER BUSINESS**

- Viviana suggested the topic of how to make Newton immigrant friendly. We'll discuss next month.
- David R. talked about today's news on the Protesting of the Olympic Torch because of China's record of human rights abuses.
- David F said that STAND is pressuring corporate sponsors to take a stand on Darfur issues and passed out a petition.
- Susan said that there are many online petitions to let President Bush know your position.
- Marianne said that given the lengthy comments we should make this an issue for discussion for the next meeting.

Our mission was re-read and there was discussion about looking at global issues vs. what is relevant to Newton. Susan suggested that at our summer pot luck meeting the only businesses should be to discuss our mission.

Peter's item of Transsexual Identity and or Expression and Size discrimination was tabled.

### **ADL:**

David F said he's been exploring the issues of ADL and genocide. He was assured by the staff of the New England branch of the ADL, that the NE ADL fully supports the Armenian Genocide. He wondered if we could re-explore our relationship with the NE Branch. Marianne and Sona spoke to our decisions and that it is not up to us to fix the division in the ADL. There was further discussion but it was noted that the National ADL has never responded to our letter or to the Mayor's letter, both sent in August 2007. All of that is on record and until the ADL publicly change their stand we can not change our stand. It is a human rights issue. It was also noted that the Mass Municipal Association withdrew yesterday from ADL's No Place for Hate Program and that is a very significant statement.

**The meeting was adjourned at 9:30pm.**

**Next meeting: Wednesday May 14, 2008 at 7:30pm in the City Hall cafeteria.**

Respectfully submitted, Beverly Droz, HRC staff director