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Sri Sri Ravi Shankar and the Art of Living Foundation Celebrate 25 Years of Service to Humanity: Members of Congress, the United Nations, Veterans and America's Youth join together to Create a "Violence-Free, Stress-Free Society"

WASHINGTON, D.C. —On March 28, 2007, at the John F. Kennedy Center for Performing Arts in Washington D.C., Sri Sri and the Art of Living Foundation USA will celebrate 25 years of service to humanity.

Scheduled speakers include Congressman Steny Hoyer, Majority Leader of the House, Senator Joseph R. Biden Jr., D-Delaware, Congresswoman Diane Watson, D-California, Congressman Jerry Lewis, R-California and Ambassador Vijay K. Nambiar, Chief of Staff for the United Nations Secretary-General. The event will also serve as a platform to launch Sri Sri's initiatives to create a "violence-free, stress-free" America. It will highlight the importance of fostering human values such as compassion, friendliness, a sense of belonging and an attitude of service to society in order to achieve this goal.

In keeping with this vision, Ambassador Nambiar will unveil a *Universal Declaration of Human Values*, developed by Sri Sri. The Declaration represents a fresh new approach for bringing about greater understanding among different peoples, and fostering harmonious coexistence among different cultures and civilizations. Sri Sri's intention is that it serves as a tool to begin a global discussion around the issues addressed in the Declaration, including the need to address the spiritual dimension of human existence, in order to resolve the serious challenges facing the world today.

Today, the Art of Living Foundation (AOLF), created by Sri Sri in 1981, is one of the world's largest volunteer organizations. Sri Sri also founded the International Association for Human Values (IAHV) in 1997. Both organizations work in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. In only 25 years, 25 million people have benefited from the Art of Living Course, in more than 140 countries.

Among the programs offered through AOLF and IAHV worldwide, is a special trauma relief course to address the emotional recovery of people impacted by conflict, war and natural disaster. Using ancient breathing techniques, the course empowers individuals with tools to alleviate the symptoms of post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD) and helps to rekindle basic human values such as compassion, enthusiasm for life and a sense of belonging.

Also scheduled to speak is Floyd "Shad" Meshad, founder and president of the National Veterans Foundation (NVF) who will honor Sri Sri on behalf of NVF. For more than 30 years, Meshad has worked as a therapist for veterans and as an advocate for veterans' rights. He was among the first to study the disorder now known as PTSD. Meshad and key staff at NVF recently participated in Sri Sri's special trauma relief course. "The course surprised me in that it showed the impact that focused breathing techniques can have in the healing of emotions," he said. "All indications are that it could be extremely helpful in the healing of traumatic emotional experiences which are

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common among returning veterans. Everyone who can breathe should take this course.”

M. Ali Bankat took the course in Iraq. “Before this experience, I was sad, depressed and I was starting to lose hope because of the situation here in Iraq,” he said. “Now after only four days I feel confident in myself – happier and have hopes and dreams again and I feel life is so beautiful.” Bankat is not alone. Already, more than 50,000 people in Southeast Asia who suffered the consequences of the 2004 tsunami have benefited from Art of Living programs. Thousands more are benefiting from these programs in Iraq, Afghanistan, Kosovo, Israel, Lebanon, India, Pakistan, Kashmir, Russia and post-Katrina New Orleans.

Sri Sri is also playing a key role in negotiating peace between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government. He is responsible for the formation of a Committee for Peace, comprising Hindu and Buddhist leaders, including His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

AOLF and IAHV are also placing a special emphasis on initiatives in Washington, D.C. and New Orleans, where violence and crime among young people continue to rise at alarming rates. “We need to deglamourize aggressive behavior. Children feel that they will be noticed, only if they behave aggressively,” Sri Sri said. “We need to change this mindset and establish non-violence and the values of Mahatma Gandhi in the classrooms”.

Paullette Jones, principal of Ideal Academy, a public charter school in Washington, DC, said, “The Art of Living Foundation has contributed to a dramatic shift in the atmosphere at Ideal Academy. Last year there was tremendous violence. Students were being robbed - even at gunpoint”, she said. “The atmosphere on campus now is much calmer. The gang that used to rile students now comes to band practice instead. There is greater cooperation among teachers who have participated in the course.”

In 2006, *The Week*, one of South Asia’s more popular magazines, cited Sri Sri as one of the sub-continent’s 10 most influential leaders. In February of the same year, more than 2.5 million people representing 110 countries, 1,000 spiritual leaders from the 10 major world religions and 750 key political figures gathered in Bangalore, India, to honor the man, his vision and his unprecedented success. It was the largest gathering for peace in history.

The gala on March 28 at the Kennedy Center has already attracted several high profile names, and is expected to replicate the prestige associated with the above-mentioned event of February 2006. **While media are invited to the event and interview times with Sri Sri are available, please contact us to be credentialed.** You may contact Patti Montella at (512)576-7264, patti@artofliving.org.

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