

PRESS RELEASE

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Conservatives and Liberals Gather to Address Polarization

'Engaging the Other: The Power of Compassion' - a four-day international conference - is slated for **November 12-15, 2009 SAN MATEO, CALIFORNIA, U.S.A.**

At a time when polarization and animosity are ratcheting up across our society and people increasingly relate to each other in shrill voices from opposing "sides," a major conference is gathering to promote wider public dialogue about how we form adversarial images of "Us and Them," and how to counteract this to improve relationships, locally and globally. The conference is open to all. Among those coming together to address rising divisiveness in the public discourse are leaders from **MoveOn.org** and **FreedomWorks**, two organizations typically opposed to each other, and key representatives of Palestinian and Israeli communities.

Common Bond Institute (CBI) is sponsoring the **4th Annual International Conference on "Engaging the Other:" The Power of Compassion (ETO)** in San Mateo, California November 12th to 15th, and is expected to attract several hundred participants from the US and around the world. There will be **presenters and participants from across the social-political spectrum**, offering a rich variety of perspectives and real-time opportunities to address conflict and practice respectful engagement.

Since 2006, the ETO Conference has been promoting public awareness and proactive efforts. This year over 75 presenters from various socio-political views, cultures, religions, and disciplines will be on hand to help explore ways to enhance understanding and compassion - exploring "The Other" from social, cultural, psychological, political, economic, spiritual, and ecological perspectives.

Among the 25 workshops and 7 panels will be a **special interactive panel of conservatives and liberals on: "Building Cooperation Across Political Divides: A Transpartisan Conversation,"** as well as panels on "Next Steps for A New Beginning: Practical Measures for Healing Stereotypes That Divide," and "Hate and Scapegoating as Barriers to Engaging The Other."

The program includes keynotes by **Huston Smith, Michael Ostrolenk, and Michael Lerner**, and a large number of workshops, panels, daily facilitated dialogue groups, and interactive all-conference experiences. **Joan Blades, co-founder of MoveOn.org, and Max Pappas of FreedomWorks** will interact with each other as part of the panel on transpartisan dialogue.

The conference emphasizes direct interaction by all and deals with the roots of fear based belief systems, negative stereotyping, prejudice, scapegoating, and enemy images that lead to conflict and hostility. It's goals are to develop practical ways of bridging misunderstanding and distrust, and to advance reconciliation, peace, and an appreciation of diversity in a world shared by many Others.

"This is a time of insecurity and turmoil in many regions of the world, including the US, and the energy of fear associated with this serves to foment distrust and divisiveness within and between societies", said Steve Olweean, director of CBI and coordinator of the conference. "At a time when polarization is the culprit, we're working to bring more of the public eye and wisdom to bear on both why and how people are polarized and often create demonic images of each other, whether they're looking across the globe or across the street. In today's world, learning how to move past such artificial barriers to cultivate a shared consciousness of peace and cooperation are simply practical survival skills for us all."

The event is a collaboration between **Common Bond Institute, Meridian University, Transpartisan Alliance, National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation, International Humanistic Psychology Association**, and more than 100 endorsing universities and organizations around the world.

"A unique quality of this event is that it is not a passive, one-way experience." Olweean, says.

"Participants actively engage in the workshops, dialogues, and multicultural community together as a living, learning laboratory intended to tap into our common wisdom and encourage practical application in our day to day relationships."

To help promote dialogue and collaboration beyond the conference, among expected outcomes are a resource library of published results and recorded proceedings, media and art exhibits, linking the conference to a network of international conferences, and laying the groundwork for creating an inclusive working network of activists for reaching across lines in cooperating on peace building initiatives, including generating post-conference public dialogue groups. An Internet blog is being launched, and an "Engaging The Other" curriculum geared to the general public is planned.

Complete information about program and registration are available online at **www.cbiworld.org**, by Email at **SOlweean@aol.com**, or by telephone at **269-665-9393**.

The ETO Conference is an on-going annual series, and the 5th event is already planned for fall 2010.

CBI has organized grassroots international conferences on conflict resolution and humanitarian training projects in the US and other countries for over 19 years, including Russia.

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