

Rasur's Prophecy of Peace

Unfolding in Costa Rica

Over 60 years ago, Costa Rican educator, poet and leader, Roberto Brenes Mesén, wrote an epic poem called *Rasur*. In this poem, a master teacher, Rasur, comes to Costa Rica and silently calls the children from the village of Quizur into a mountain. There he teaches them about the great power that is hidden in the heart of every human being. When the children return to their parents, they have become peacemakers. As a result, the parents also become inspired and realize that “before directing the lightning in the sky, we must first harness the storm in our own hearts.” Their village becomes a culture of peace, thriving with creativity and harmony.

The poem *Rasur* predicted the destiny of Costa Rica as a model for peace. This prophetic poem was written in 1946, two years before Costa Rica abolished its army on December 1, 1948. The prophecy continues to unfold and serves as an inspiration for the Rasur Foundation to help fulfill this vision. Although Costa Rica is a small, developing country, it has become a significant power for peace in the world.

Costa Rica's history contains an unusual thread of decisions for peace:

- Juan Vásquez de Coronado, who colonized Costa Rica in 1562, brought an attitude distinct from that of most conquistadors: he believed in treating the native inhabitants with respect and using force only as a last resort.
- President Tomás Guardia abolished the death penalty in 1877 at the urging of his wife, on their 25th wedding anniversary. This decision was enshrined in Article 21 of the Constitution.
- The year 1948 was the major turning point toward peace in Costa Rican history. After a 44-day civil war, José (“Pepe”) Figueres became the provisional president, and was instrumental in writing Costa Rica's new constitution. In it, he abolished the army, making Costa Rica the first country in the world to do so. The new constitution also established free elections, guaranteed public education, gave women the vote and granted full citizenship to the Afro-Caribbean population. The constitution also provided citizen rights that were ahead of their time including a progressive labor code, a system of social security, and a set of social guarantees. Today Costa Rica remains the only country in the world with no army and no arrangement for defense. This strong peace-based constitution provided a stable and just foundation for Costa Rican society, which helped the country avoid the violence that has plagued other Central American countries. These factors resulted in Costa Rica becoming one of the most democratic, prosperous countries in Latin America.
- In the 1980s when Nicaragua was engaged in civil war, Costa Rica was pressured by the United States to allow it to build military bases for the “Contras,” a guerilla group trained by the CIA. To escape this pressure, President Luis Alberto Monge declared that it was the policy of Costa Rica to remain neutral in international conflicts. This policy was formally adopted as Article 7 of the Constitution in November 1983.

- In another gesture that demonstrated Costa Rica's devotion to peace, in 1980 President Rodrigo Carazo facilitated the donation of Costa Rican land to found the United Nations University for Peace, which was approved by the 35th UN General Assembly. The mission of UPeace is to "provide humanity with an international institution of higher education for peace with the aims of promoting among all human beings a spirit of understanding, lessening threats to world peace and progress, and in keeping with the noble aspirations proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations."
- President Carazo also proposed a UN Resolution for an International Day of Peace, to be celebrated as a global ceasefire on the opening day of the UN session each year. This resolution was passed in 1981. In 2001, a new resolution was proposed by the United Kingdom and Costa Rica, changing the date to September 21 each year. The resolution passed unanimously and this Day of Peace is now celebrated around the world.
- In 1986, Oscar Arias became President of Costa Rica at a time marked by intense conflict and civil war in Central America. Under his leadership, the five Central American presidents signed the Esquipulas II Peace Accords in 1987. This agreement provided for national reconciliation, an end to hostilities, democratization, free elections, resettlement of refugees, and negotiations on arm controls in all Central American countries. Arias won the Nobel Peace Prize for this achievement.
- In 1997, a law for the Alternative Resolution of Conflicts and Peace Promotion was passed in Costa Rica. This law requires peace education in every school and also establishes the legal basis for alternative methods of conflict resolution, such as mediation.
- Also in 1997, the Unity Center of Costa Rica introduced the UN-endorsed Season for Nonviolence to Costa Rica. This educational campaign is held each year between January 30th and April 4th, which are the dates of the assassinations of Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., respectively. Now, government ministries of Costa Rica lead the nation in this campaign every year.
- At the international level, Costa Rica's main foreign policy objective is to foster human rights and sustainable development as a way to secure stability and growth. Costa Rica has been a leader in establishing international human rights instruments, such as the American Convention on Human Rights, and it is the seat of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.
- The concept of peace includes protection of the environment. Costa Rica has taken a strong stance in favor of the environment and is working steadfastly to eliminate environmental abuses. In 2006, Costa Ricans re-elected Oscar Arias as their President. In 2007, President Arias announced a new goal: for Costa Rica to become the first carbon-neutral country in the world by 2021.

New efforts to strengthen Costa Rica's peace model are having great success:

- In late 2005, Rita Marie Johnson, founder of the Rasur Foundation, became aware of the Global Alliance of Ministries and Departments for Peace, made up of countries working toward setting up this infrastructure for peace. She began researching the idea of a Ministry for Peace for Costa Rica and, with input from her colleagues, wrote a proposal to establish a Ministry of Justice and Peace in Costa Rica.
- On May 29, 2006, the Vice President of the Rasur Foundation, Alexandra Kissling, and Rita Marie presented this proposal to Rodrigo Arias, Minister of the Presidency. This initiative would add “Peace” to the title of the Ministry for Justice and empower that ministry to lead peace efforts in Costa Rica. It was embraced by both Minister Rodrigo Arias and President Oscar Arias and was then written as a bill. In this process, it evolved into a National System for the Promotion of Peace. The bill was signed by 19 of the 57 congressional representatives and submitted to the Legislative Assembly on November 2, 2006. The bill passed on August 19, 2009.
- Then-Vice President Laura Chinchilla appointed Rita Marie to represent Costa Rica at the 2007 Summit of the Global Alliance for Ministries and Departments for Peace held in Japan. At this Summit, the Global Alliance (now made up of 36 countries) acknowledged Costa Rica's progress in establishing a Ministry for Peace and wrote a letter to Vice President Chinchilla, requesting that Costa Rica serve as the host of their 2009 Summit. Consequently, Costa Rica hosted the Summit in September 2009.
- While working on the Ministry for Peace bill, the Rasur Foundation added a clause mandating that the new ministry will work with nonprofit organizations to implement a national plan for peace promotion. On June 17, the Ministry of Justice and the Rasur Foundation held a meeting, attended by 58 representatives of NGOs, to initiate this work. The meeting was held at the headquarters of the Rasur Foundation and was successful in uniting NGOs to collaborate more closely in peace promotion and to engage in the upcoming Summit.
- In addition to advocating for the Ministry for Justice and Peace bill, the Rasur Foundation's other main project is the Academy for Peace of Costa Rica (APCR), which was established in October 2003. The mission of the Academy is to empower every child to pass peace skills to the next generation. This academy is in alignment with the proposed national model that is embraced by many in the Global Alliance; a ministry for peace with an academy for peace as its educational arm, teaching peace to leaders and citizens as well as children and youth.
- The Academy teaches the practice of BePeace, which is the synergistic combination of coherence through appreciation, and connection to universal needs through empathy and honesty that Rita Marie Johnson, discovered in her personal search for peace. The Academy aims to educate and empower trainers called “Rasurs” to teach BePeace to students, teachers and parents in public and private schools. These trainings are generally held at Quizur, the two-acre headquarters of the Rasur Foundation named after the village in the poem, *Rasur*. In the future, these classes will also be offered online.

President Arias said, “We are envisioning the Academy for Peace as a lasting force in Costa Rican culture and as an example to other countries of the possibilities for human progress.”. Now that the bill for a Ministry of Justice and Peace has passed, the Academy for Peace of Costa Rica has offered to collaborate in supporting its educational efforts.

Because Costa Rica does not support an army, it has more funds for social development. Now, with an Academy for Peace, eventually every citizen will be able to pass peace skills to the next generation. And, finally, with a Ministry of Justice and Peace working closely with the new alliance of NGOs, Costa Rica will have achieved a model of national peace infrastructure that will ensure lasting peace and prosperity.

Although Costa Rica is struggling with many modern-day issues, including escalating violence, its history and current efforts clearly demonstrate an ongoing identity with peace. Step by step, this nation will surely fulfill Rasur’s prophecy that it will model peace to the world.