



## The Background of the Tehran Peace Museum

The Tehran Peace Museum began with a conversation between Dr. Shahriar Khateri of the Tehran-based non-governmental organization (NGO) the **Society for Chemical Weapons Victims Support** (SCWVS) and Dr. Peter van de Dungen of the University of Bradford's Department of Peace Studies. Dr. van de Dungen is general coordinator of the International Peace Museums Network. Both attended a conference in Ypres, Belgium, marking the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first use of chemical weaponry in modern warfare. Dr. Khateri's admiration for the Ypres Peace Museum and Dr. Dungen's expertise in the field, along with his encouragement, sparked the idea of a peace museum in Tehran.

During the initial phases of planning the museum, Steve Fryburg of the Dayton International Peace Museum visited Iran and provided crucial advice and encouragement. Dr. Khateri tapped into the organized network of Iranian victims of chemical weapons attacks by Saddam Hussein during the eight-year Iran-Iraq war. These victims received the idea of establishing Tehran's first peace museum with enthusiasm and hope. Their desire was to share with the world their stories of the most unconscionable hardships. Today, war survivors are the very volunteers that make the Tehran Peace Museum function on a day to day basis. Their presence also offers visitors access to living monuments and lessons detailing the atrocities of warfare.

Initially housed in the basement of the SCWVS headquarters, the Tehran Peace Museum had a humble beginning. As the voices of Iranian victims of warfare joined together to speak of the sinister ills of war, particularly chemical warfare, they were able to enlist the cooperation of the city of Tehran. The municipality donated the museum's current building in the historic City Park in the heart of the bustling capital of Iran.

The museum was dedicated on 29 June 2007, the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the chemical attack on the town of Sardasht in northwestern Iran. June 29<sup>th</sup> has been designated as the National Day for Campaigning against Chemical and Biological Weapons. Unveiled at the same time in the center of City Park, 150 meters from the Peace Museum, was the Tehran Peace Monument.

The Tehran Peace Museum is planned to be as much an interactive peace center as a museum. It includes a peace education program that will hold workshops and host conferences on peace culture, reconciliation, international humanitarian law, disarmament, and peace advocacy. Additionally, the museum houses a documentary studio that provides a workspace wherein the individual stories of victims of warfare can be captured and archived for the historical record. A virtual museum connecting Tehran with peace museums throughout the world is another component of the Tehran Peace Museum. The museum's peace library includes a collection of literature spanning topics from international law, to peace implementation, to oral histories of veterans and victims of war. Permanent and rotating peace-related art exhibitions displaying the work of international and Iranian artists will be housed in the museum complex. Finally, the

Iranian secretariat for the international organization "Mayors for Peace" will be housed in the Tehran Peace Museum.

### ***A General History of the Peace Museum Movement***

Peace museums are a relatively new idea. War, on the other hand, has enjoyed glorification through monuments, literature, art, and war museums for centuries. Against the backdrop of these relatively one-sided accounts, the idea arose of comprehensively recording the details of warfare—its depravity, the acute human costs associated with war, the totality of warfare that extends beyond images of glory and valor—in the setting of a formally organized museum. The motivation for such an endeavor was and still is the faith that “making people aware of the reality of war [is] tantamount to educating them for peace.”<sup>1</sup>

The dawn of the age of modern warfare at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century provided an impetus for Jean de Bloch, a Polish-Russian entrepreneur, to establish the first noted peace museum of our era. In 1902, the International Museum of War and Peace was opened to the public in Lucerne, Switzerland. It was another two decades before another peace museum took root. In the wake of the devastating effects of World War I on European society, particularly in the German republic, Ernst Friedrich launched the First International Anti-War Museum in Berlin in 1925. It was later closed by the Nazi regime in 1933 as Friedrich fled persecution.

The second wave of peace museums sprung up after the destructive years of World War II. Appropriately, the majority of these museums were established in Japan, where a keen understanding of the fatal consequences of nuclear warfare was realized. The cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were centers of staunch opposition to nuclear warfare that spread throughout the world. Peace museums also were instituted in post-war Germany.

Today peace museums can be found in every continent of the world. Though war still lingers, there is hope to be found in the growth of the peace museum movement. Efforts aimed at furthering the cause of peace are truly “an incrementalist enterprise.”<sup>2</sup> The greater the presence of peace museums, the more palpable the message of peace for the general public to approach, appreciate, and assimilate as part of their own beliefs.

The Tehran Peace Museum is a proud member of this tradition.

“the Culture of Peace is a set of values, attitudes, modes of behavior and ways of life that reject violence and prevent conflicts by tackling their root causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation among individuals, groups and nations” (UN Resolutions [A/RES/52/13](#): Culture of Peace and [A/RES/53/243](#), Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace).

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<sup>1</sup> van den Dungen, Peter. “Peace Education: Peace Museums.” *Encyclopedia of Violence, Peace, and Conflict*. Vol 2. Academic Press, 1999. 691-703.

<sup>2</sup> Austin, Jay E., Bruch, Carl E. [The Environmental Consequences of War: Legal, Economic, and Scientific Perspectives](#). Cambridge University Press, Cambridge UK. 2000. 6.