

## A Breath of Fresh Air at Zonderwater Prison



“The best of what I gained in this program is hope,” says Lucky, one of the graduates of the recent Peace Education Program (PEP) at Zonderwater Prison in South Africa.

“Our situation in prison at times is so discouraging, frustrating and boring. Then with this program your morale is uplifted—you see change in others, and when it rubs over you it brings satisfaction, acceptance, tolerance and fresh air, which energizes and inspires you for better dreams about tomorrow.”

The PEP has a long and distinguished history at Zonderwater. Over the last five years, 750 inmates have had the opportunity to attend the PEP courses, which represents a substantial part of the total population of 3,500. In November 2012, Prem Rawat visited Zonderwater and addressed 300 inmates who had attended the PEP courses. The visit was inspirational and provided impetus and depth to the already thriving PEP program.

Thabo, another PEP graduate, had experienced a traumatic childhood. When he was just four, his mother and he ran away from his father’s house where she worked as a maid. But then she died, and he was left alone with no home or means of locating his father again.

“This program has changed my life,” he said. “Happiness, freedom, kindness—I did not know how to feel them. I did not know where to find peace. Solitude and melancholy were destroying me. Today I have clarity.” Solomon, another participant, explained: “I was a gang member in and out of prison. I now understand that peace is food inside of me. This is the first certificate I have received in my whole life. This program has helped me realize that I’ve always looked outward for solutions

or relief from problems—like religion or drugs, neither of which has ever really satisfied me. I now know that I can draw on my inner strength and resources to help me in my daily life.”

“I was imprisoned without committing a crime,” Thabang revealed. “I had this anger inside of me. I have learned to forgive and to feel peace inside of me. I have learned this all from Prem Rawat.”

Another graduate, Phineas, said: “I have been here in prison for 20 years. It is painful. Since this program, I forgive those who put me in jail. What I learned is to appreciate whatever happens in my life.”

The Zonderwater PEPs have been so successful—appreciated by inmates and prison authorities alike—that since Prem Rawat’s visit, new courses have started up at Johannesburg Correctional Prison, Pollsmoor Prison in Cape Town, and Westville Correctional Facility in Durban. Discussions are underway to begin a PEP at Malmesbury Prison in Western Cape Province.