



## World's largest torch relay for international friendship in Portugal to celebrate its 25th anniversary

Start of the European Leg of the World Harmony Run

**On 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2012 Figueira da Foz** will play host to the opening ceremony for the European leg of the World Harmony Run, the world's largest torch relay for peace and international friendship. The international team of the World Harmony Run and local schoolchildren will start the Run, which celebrates its 25th anniversary this year, at 9 am at Cabo Mondego in Figueira da Foz after releasing white doves and proceed to the official opening ceremony at Centro de Artes e Espectáculos, which begins at 10 am. During the opening ceremony 400 children from 13 schools will perform and an exhibition of paintings for peace from children will be launched.

**UNICEF Ambassador and marathon world record holder in 1999 Tegla Loroupe and Mayor João Albino Rainho Ataíde das Neves** will address the participants.

From Figueira da Foz an international team of runners will carry a flaming torch as a symbol of harmony, passing it from hand to hand and heart to heart, eastwards through Coimbra, Viseu, Fornos de Algodres, Pinhel and Almeida. The runners will visit school children, community groups, organisations from all walks of life, dignitaries and athletes, sharing with them the ideals of encouragement and support for others and fostering teamwork and harmony in our day-to-day lives. The World Harmony Runners will leave Portugal on February 27th and travel on a **24,000 km journey through 45 European countries** to finish in Vienna on 8 October.

Peace visionary Sri Chinmoy founded the World Harmony Run in 1987, named Peace Run at that time. Since then the initiative visited over 150 countries and international teams of runners run far more than 500,000 km or more than thirteen times around the circumference of the earth. The simple message of the Run - "Harmony begins with me" - has inspired millions the world over.

In 2012 runs will take place throughout North and South America, Asia, Africa, Australia, Europe and New Zealand visiting over 100 countries and covering a total distance of 70.000 km. Over the coming months runners will do about 100 km a day. One or two vehicles follow the teams of runners as they carry the torch from town to town each day with each runner expected to cover 7 miles or more.

Endorsements have come from many world figures, including President Nelson Mandela, President Mikhail Gorbachev, Mother Teresa and Carl Lewis. Carl Lewis, spokesman for the Run, said, "By carrying the Torch, millions of citizens are taking a step for harmony and bridging the cultural and social boundaries that separate nation from nation". Dr. Davidson Hepburn, President of the 35th General Conference of UNESCO, expressed his appreciation for the torch relay: "The Harmony Run Torch, passed from hand to hand, has encouraged millions of individuals to aspire for a world of oneness and peace. ... I wish you continued success as you expand your efforts."

The run is a non-profit event organized and financed entirely by volunteers inspired by Sri Chinmoy's initiative, which simply strives to encourage goodwill among peoples of all nations. The World Harmony Run does not seek to raise money or highlight any political cause. Everyone can participate: athletes and non-athletes, young and old alike. Carry the Torch a few steps, a few blocks or a few miles or just come out and cheer the runners as they pass.

To find out more about the World Harmony Run and the progress of the running teams, visit "Live from the road" at [www.worldharmonyrun.org](http://www.worldharmonyrun.org)

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