

## Activity Report: 2007-08



*International Widows Day event in Sri Lanka, 23 June 2007*

### 2007: A Significant Year for The Loomba Trust

It has indeed been a momentous year and we are determined to build on the foundations we have laid both in India and internationally. During the year, the Trust has organised events in the UK, USA and India both to raise awareness and the much-needed funds. Cherie Blair and Lord Dholakia visited India in January, 2008 for 5 days during which they met the Trust's beneficiaries in Mumbai, Punjab and Delhi.

The Trust aims to create awareness about the plight of widows and to provide help for them and their families. It also works to tackle the massive problems of empowering widows and educating their children through Corporate Social Responsibility. We continue working closely with all our Patrons, Trustees, advisors, partners and supporters through out the world.

### Our work during the year

In India, we are continuing to educate 3600 children, same as last year, of poor widows and their mothers in all 29 states, including 500 children who lost their father or both parents in the devastating tsunami in Nagapattinum in Tamil Nadu. All beneficiaries are selected irrespective of religion, gender and caste, who will receive scholarship for an initial period of 5 years.

As part of our global work, we have begun to collaborate with the Prince of Wales' international charity, Youth Business International, to start businesses and create opportunities for disadvantaged young widows and youth in Uganda, Bangladesh, Kenya and Sri Lanka. We also continue our partnership with Sir Richard Branson's charity, Virgin Unite, to support 1500 HIV orphans in South Africa.

We have produced an International Widows Day dossier, which highlights the plight of widows and their children around the world, who are suffering through poverty, illiteracy, HIV/AIDS, conflict and social injustice. The dossier will be distributed to every UN representative and foreign ministers of all

member countries. Our campaign to get the UN recognition of International Widows Day is real and active.

## **London Premiere of Deepa Mehta's film - WATER**

We were delighted that working in connection with Metrodome and the Habib Bank AG Zurich, the Loomba Trust co-hosted the Premier of "Water", a film by Deepa Mehta. Lisa Ray attended the premiere.

Water, which was nominated for an Academy Award as Best Foreign Language film this year, tackles the controversial role of widows in India. The film explains the continuing anguish, poverty and isolation the majority of the 35 millions widows still face.

Set against the epic backdrop of the River Ganges in 1938 during Mahatma Gandhi's rise to power, Water is the inspiring tale of an eight year old Hindu girl names Chuyia. Chuyia's life is suddenly changed when she is widowed and sent to a home where Hindu widows must live in penitence.

She refuses to accept her fate and her feisty presence begins to affect the lives of the other residence, including a beautiful young widow (Lisa Ray of Bollywood/Hollywood) who has fallen in love with Gandhian idealist, Narayan (Bollywood star John Abraham).



## **23rd June 2007 - International Widows Day – an Annual Campaign Day**

On behalf of the Loomba Trust, Cherie Blair launched a Blimp airship in Trafalgar Square in London to mark International Widows Day, an annual campaign day that aims to raise awareness of the hardship faced by millions of widows and their children in much of the developing world. The Blimp airship flew over the square on Friday 22nd June and Saturday 23rd June, which was the 3rd International Widows Day.

The launch of the Blimp was one of many global events taking place on International Widows day. In New Delhi, the Honourable Minister for Women and Child Development attended, as Chief Guest, the Trust's 10th Anniversary Celebration Dinner, which was held at the India International Centre on

23 June 2007. The event was attended by over 200 beneficiaries of the Trust, including children and their widowed mothers, who travelled to the capital from 18 different states of India.

The Honourable Minister said in her speech that she would do everything in her capacity to remove the taboo of widowhood in India and give poor widows a chance to live a life of fulfilment and dignity. She also commended and acknowledged the pioneering work of the Loomba Trust.

Balloons were released in Nairobi, Dhaka and Colombo to mark the 3rd International Widows Day by the HRH The Prince of Wales's charity, Youth Business International, who is managing the Loomba Entrepreneur Projects in these three countries to support young widows and Youths.

### **17th October 2007 - Diwali at The Mansion House in London**

The annual London Diwali Dinner in support of the Loomba Trust, traditionally co-hosted by the Mayor of London and the business organisation London First, took place at the Mansion House in the City of London. Guests at the glittering occasion were received by the Immediate Past Lord Mayor of London, Alderman Sir David Brewer, and addressed by the Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Ian Blair, who was the guest of honour.

The Mansion House was packed to capacity for this key date in the London calendar to see the Mayor, Loomba Trust chairman Raj Loomba and other dignitaries light the Diwali lamps – this year celebrating the tenth anniversary of the charity which has transformed the lives of thousands of widows' families in India and drawn attention to the plight of widows as an urgent global issue.

Tribute was paid at the dinner to former Indian High Commissioner Dr Laxmi Mal Singhvi, who passed away in Delhi earlier this month (6 OCT). Dr Singhvi was instrumental in helping Raj Loomba establish the Loomba Trust in 1997 and was for ten years the Chairman Trustee of the charity's Indian arm.

London's celebration of India's national festival attracts a great deal of attention in the sub-continent and Indian TV covered the event live channel MATV. Living Bollywood legend Dev Anand used the occasion to launch his book, called 'Romancing with Dev Anand'. Other prominent guests included Olympics Minister Tessa Jowell, Liberal peer Lord Dholakia, Cobra beer founder Lord Bilimoria and the renowned Bollywood film producer Ravi Chopra.

Mike Tobin, chief executive of TelecityGroup and chairman of the Friends of the Loomba Trust, appealed to guests to educate at least one child of a poor widow in India for one year and other fundraising activities included a raffle and auction, raising altogether £250,000 on the evening. Of this, £25,000 was donated to the Safer London Foundation and the remaining £225,000 will go towards the education of 3,600 children of poor widows being supported by the Loomba Trust in India.



*First Lady Laura Bush receives the Loomba Foundation's Humanitarian Award at the White House*

29th November 2007 - Diwali at the United Nations in New York

The Loomba Foundation, a sister charity of the Loomba Trust, founded to benefit widows and children around the world hosted a Diwali dinner at the United Nations, honouring First Lady Laura Bush, and Craig Barrett, Chairman of the Board, Intel Corporation, for their leadership in education on Thursday, November 29, 2007.

Mrs. Laura Bush, who is actively involved in issues of national and global concern with a particular emphasis on education, healthcare and human rights, was honoured with the 2007 Humanitarian Award for Education. In her video message, she said "Thank you to Cherie Blair and to everyone at the Loomba Foundation for honouring me with this year Humanitarian Award for Education. Most of all, thank you for the outstanding work you do every day to help widows and children. The award was presented to Mrs. Bush at the White House in Washington DC by Cherie Blair and Raj Loomba on 30th November, 2007.

Craig Barrett, Chairman of the Board, Intel Corporation, was presented with a 2007 Humanitarian Award for his leadership and commitment to global education of disadvantaged children. "We are big believers at Intel that all poor children, everywhere, deserve the chance to change the world, and that possibility begins with a strong education", said Mr. Barrett. "We are proud to receive this honour from the Loomba Foundation, an organization that supports the potential of education for children in need".

The Diwali dinner was attended by Cherie Blair and Lord Navnit Dholakia from London and Vijay Amritraj, renowned Tennis World Champion, Mrs Veronica Hearst, Meera Gandhi and many other

prominent dignitaries from the US. The Foundation raised US\$ 100,000 at the event, which will be used to educate children of poor widows in India.

### **8 January 2008 – The Loomba Trust Honoured by NRI Institute in Delhi**

The NRI Institute of India honoured the Loomba Trust in recognition of the exemplary work to raise awareness of the plight of poor widows and their children around the world.

The Award was presented to the Founder Chairman Trustee, Mr. Raj Loomba by the British High Commissioner, Sir Richard Stagg at a glittering dinner at the Intercontinental Hotel in New Delhi on 8th January, 2008.

### **9-14 January, 2008 – President Cherie Blair visits India**

The five-day visit to India of the President of the Loomba Trust, Mrs Cherie Blair, from 10 to 14 January 2008, highlighted the plight of poor widows and the education of their children in the Indian and global media. The wife of the former British Prime Minister, Cherie Blair, has been actively involved with The Loomba Trust since it was established in 1997 in the UK. The purpose of her visit to India was to spend time with these underprivileged children and their struggling mothers whom the Trust is assisting in India, and to raise awareness more widely of the work of the Trust. Mrs Blair also promoted the declaration of an International Widows Day on 23 June by the United Nations to draw global attention on the problems and concerns faced by widows.

During her visit, she focused on meeting the distressed widows and their children who are being educated by the Trust. Her busy schedule included meeting Indian leaders and opinion makers to acquaint them of the suffering of the widows not only in India but the world over.

A large contingent of media persons covered this visit for the print and electronic media as most TV channels in the India and many ethnic channels abroad carried the news of the visit in Britain and the United States, among other countries. The print media gave prominence to the news of this visit all over India as no less than 85 news clippings resulted from the major English and Hindi newspapers. Hundreds of Internet sites providing news of India carried reports of this visit.

### **Underprivileged Children See Film Shooting at Bollywood Studio in Mumbai**

On her maiden visit to Mumbai, she accompanied a group of underprivileged children together with their widowed mothers, to experience the glamour of Bollywood Studios. They visited the sets of 'Aladdin' in Film City and met the stars. She gifted sweets to the children who are beneficiaries of the Loomba Trust scholarships.

### **Honoured by Priyadarshani Academy in Mumbai**

Later in the evening, the Priyadarshani Academy honoured Mrs Blair with a memento for her humanitarian work. In her speech, she announced enhanced cooperation between The Loomba Trust and the Priyadarshani Academy in assisting widows and their children. The dinner organized by the Priyadarshani Academy also honoured Mr Raj Loomba, Lord Dholakia and Mrs Veena Loomba for their contribution to the Trust. Mr Jayantoraop Patil, Hon Minister for Finance and Planning of Maharashtra was the Chief Guest and Mr Suresh Prabhu; M.P. was the Guest of Honour. Celebrity guests included the Sheriff of Mumbai, Mr Burman of Dabur, actor Poonam Dhillon and actor Nagma, among others.

In addition to her visit to the Film City and the gala dinner, Mrs Blair found time for some exclusive interviews with some prominent newspapers and TV channels about her visit and these were widely published in the print and the electronic media.

## Loomba Trust Upgrades Village School

From Mumbai, Mrs Blair and her party flew to Chandigarh to meet the Chief Minister for Punjab, Mr Prakash Singh Badal, some senior Ministers and officers of the state government. On behalf of The Loomba Trust, she signed an agreement with the Punjab Government to renovate, refurbish and provide sanitation and drinking water for a school in Dhilwan Village, near Kapurthala, at a cost of Rupees ten million – half of this to be met by The Loomba Trust and the other half by the Punjab Government. The school will be renamed Shri Jagiri Lal Loomba Memorial School in memory of the late father of Mr Raj Loomba. Mr Raj Loomba was born in this village and later migrated to Britain where he became a successful businessman. In the evening, the Punjab Chief Minister hosted a dinner at his residence in honour of Mrs Blair and her party.

## Village Students Dance with Joy at Mrs Blair Visit

Early next morning, Mrs Blair and her entourage set off for Dhilwan Village where she was warmly welcomed by the local leaders, the staff and the students of the school. Mrs Blair toured the school, met the students and especially the ones sponsored by The Loomba Trust. She learnt of the problems of their widowed mothers striving against poverty and how their lives had changed after assistance from The Loomba Trust. The students greeted her joyously with typical Punjabi folk songs and dances and invited Mrs Blair and Mrs Veena Loomba to join them - and the large group of media persons recorded the poignant scene.

## Homage at The Golden Temple in the Holy City of Amritsar

Later, she travelled to Amritsar to pay homage at the Golden temple, the holiest temple for the Sikhs. This visit was extensively covered in the India and global media, as it was the first time that she had visited this holy shrine. The Akali Dal took note of her visit and honoured her.

## Conference on Empowering Women and Educating Children

Then she came to New Delhi for a conference: 'Bharat Nirman (Development of India) Through Corporate Social Responsibility: Empowering Women and Educating Children in India'. "How can an Indian widow become an asset instead of a liability?" was the core concern of this conference attended by Shri Vayalar Ravi, the Minister of Overseas Indian Affairs, as the Chief Guest and presided over by the British High Commissioner Sir Richard Stagg at FICCI Federation House, New Delhi on Sunday, 13 January, 2008. Among other dignitaries were Lord Dholakia, Sir Mark Tully, Mr Dhindsa, representatives of UNICEF, other NGOs and social activists.

At this event, Mrs Blair met 50 students sponsored by The Loomba Trust for their education, their widowed mothers and some of their teachers. Keynote addresses at the conference were delivered by the Minister of Overseas Indian Affairs, Lord Dholakia, Mr Raj Loomba, Sir Richard Stagg and, of course, by Mrs Blair. A dossier was launched at this event by the main guests. This dossier presents the situation of widows around the world and advocates the United Nations to declare 23 June as the International Widows Day. After the formal speeches, Mrs Blair met the conference participants at lunch. In the afternoon, she visited the Bahai Temple, the Catholic Church and the Akshardham Temple in New Delhi before returning home the next day.

## The Loomba Entrepreneur Programme: South Africa

Cherie Blair, President, launched the Loomba Entrepreneur Programme in South Africa at a private dinner at the Summer Place in Johannesburg on 21st February 2008. Rt Hon Tony Blair, former British Prime Minister, Honourable Finance Minister, Mr. Trevor Manuel and HE Paul Boateng, the British High Commissioner to South Africa, attended the launch amongst many other prominent business leaders

The Loomba Entrepreneur Programme aims to set up business for at least 100 young widows in South Africa. The Trust is establishing a South African Chapter with its own advisory Council, which will be chaired by the Trust's Patron Lady Williams. It will work in partnership with leading international NGOs to deliver the programme.

At the launch, Mrs. Blair said, "Through practical help and campaigning, the Loomba Trust is playing a leading role in easing the plight of widows all over the world. Through this latest initiative, we are determined to help widows build a better life for themselves and their families.

In his welcome speech, the Founder Chairman Trustee, Raj Loomba, thanked the Blairs for attending the launch and praised Cherie Blaire for her tireless and continued support for the work of the Loomba Trust.

Raj added: "The Loomba Trust has been working in South Africa since later 2006. Through our partnership with Virgin Unite, a charity of Sir Richard Branson's, we are supporting 1500 HIV orphans in five Townships surrounding Johannesburg".

Both Mrs. Blair and Mr. Loomba in their speeches stressed the importance of winning recognition for June 23 as International Widows Day. Mrs. Blair said such international recognition would help "draw global attention to the scale and scope of the problems that widows face around the world".

#### Friends of The Three Faiths Forum

Lord Dholakia, Sir Sigmund Sternberg and Chair of the Friends of the Three Faiths Forum Raj Loomba hosted a lunch at the House of Lords on the 6th March 2008, to launch the Friends of the Three Faiths Forum. The Guests of Honour was Cherie Blair. Guests included Rt. Hon. Lord Woolf, Mr. Peter Bottomley, Mr. Francis Campbell Ambassador to the Holy See.