

## **Citizen Mediators- The Workshop**

Democracy is in crisis today. For the first time since the end of WW2, we cannot take, either, democracy or universal human rights for granted. If we, the citizens of democratic nations do not invest in strengthening our democratic societies, the values we cherish, such as freedom, individual dignity, autonomy and egalitarianism will be swept aside by xenophobia, intolerance, bigotry and oppression.

**Citizen Mediators** is part of **CitizenDEMOS**, a collaborative started by citizens who are concerned about the health and sustainability of democracies across the world. We organize ourselves according to our professional expertise, such as **Citizen Mediators, Citizen Social Workers, Citizen Engineers** or **Citizen Teachers**, to further the mission and objectives of **CitizenDEMOS**.

To be effective, we need to step outside of our professional and personal worlds and become active citizens who are visible in the public space and whose voices will be heard. We need to use our skills and knowledge to develop and help implement new platforms and processes to build bridges between polarized groups; build trust in our communities and the larger society; create innovative curricula, workshops and learning experiences to educate ourselves and the rest of the citizenry; and find creative ways of influencing decision-makers and those in power.

**Citizen Mediators** is a wholly non-partisan initiative to step back from and ask ourselves tough questions about our role as citizens; step away from our echo chambers, conspiracy theories and political biases; appreciate the uniqueness of a democratic society and its vulnerabilities; and find creative ways to strengthen democratic values and institutions and influence the larger society.

**Citizen Mediators- The Workshop**: is an opportunity to:

- a) Learn about Citizen Mediators- the initiative and the movement
- b) Connect with colleagues elsewhere who are mobilizing to be active citizens
- c) Brainstorm how you, too, can become an active citizen in our public space
- d) Appreciate, anew, the history and unique values of our profession
- e) Learn how our skills and wisdom are critical to democratic functioning
- f) Discover the indispensable role we can play in strengthening democracy
- g) Strategize to collaborate and save/ strengthen democracy

## **Biographic Note**

**Ashok Panikkar**, founder of **Meta-Culture** and **CitizenDEMOS** is a mediator and dialogue facilitator who works extensively with polarized groups. Most recently he has designed and facilitated complex dialogues with stakeholders in the garment/ apparel sector and conservative Muslim/ Hindu and Christian/ Hindu groups. He has also worked on conflicts related to race, gay marriage, immigration and business and has designed and convened creative platforms for civic engagement.

He is a past Board member of the New England ACR and Mediators Beyond Borders International. Meta-Culture was the ACR International Leadership Award winner in 2010. As an ardent student of politics and history he is acutely aware that he has been privileged to live as a free man in a democratic society and is committed to ensuring that future generations will have the same rights and freedoms.