



FOREWORD

President Oscar Arias

Now more than ever the world needs new leaders – forward-looking people who care about the planet and all of its people. We need leaders who are willing to take a stand and work together to build a more peaceful and sustainable world.

For over 74 years, the Costa Rican people have taken a stand to preserve our nation’s historic commitment to defund the military. We’ve invested these funds in our future--caring for our people, educating our children, and preserving our pristine lands.

As a result, we’ve become a beacon of stability and prosperity in Central America, ready to collaborate with our neighbors. In 1987 I introduced a Peace Plan to pacify the region and end the conflict in Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua. My Peace Plan was signed by the five Central American presidents on August 7, 1987, in Guatemala City. That same year I was honored to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. With the proceeds of the prize, I founded the Arias Foundation for Peace and Human Progress.

Thanks to our collective efforts, Costa Rica has become an early leader in sustainability. We pioneered renewable energy, and today 98.5 percent of our electricity is generated from renewable sources. With our Sustainable Tourism and Green Leaf programs we’ve demonstrated that sustainability is good for business and for our planet. We’ve taken the bold step of banning all fossil fuel exploration and are on track to be the first fossil-free green nation in the world. And at COP26 Costa Rica, along with Denmark, led the Beyond Oil and Gas Alliance (BOGA), challenging others to take a stand and envision a fossil-free world. We are eager for other nations to join with us.

In 2003, I was inspired by the people of Vieques, Puerto Rico, who bravely took a stand against the US military presence on their island. After 68 years of sacrifice and nonviolent civil disobedience, they finally succeeded. As they strug-

gled to rebuild their lives, their community, and their fragile economy, I wanted to bring attention to what they had achieved and offer much needed support.

Later that year, when Deepak Chopra and I launched the Alliance for New Humanity, we held it near Vieques, in San Juan, Puerto Rico. We brought together global leaders, including Al Gore, Kerry Kennedy, and Teresa Heinz Kerry, and business leaders and celebrities like Ricky Martin and Antonio Banderas. Our vision was to build a global human network that would lead to the creation of a critical mass that could influence national and international policy toward a more compassionate humanity.

I'm grateful that Marianne Larned joined with us and accepted my invitation to visit Vieques. This led to what would become the Stone Soup Leadership Institute's four-year bilingual demonstration project. Working alongside the mayor of Vieques, the community, and their Spanish-speaking supporters, they invested in the island's youth by providing educational tools and training programs and created the Vieques Youth Leadership Initiative.

I'm inspired by the stories in this book of young Viequenses like Josue Cruz Morales and Kassandra Castillo. They've inspired young people to realize their dreams – and envision a more peaceful and sustainable world—from Vieques to Hawaii, Boston, Martha's Vineyard, and beyond. They give us all hope for our collective future.

We must invest in all our young people. Sometimes we doubt our ability to create change. At times, the odds seem overwhelming. The stories in this book show us that it is possible. And the companion curriculum gives educators the tools they need to educate our children and prepare the next generation to be leaders. It's important for our youth to learn how they can stand on our shoulders – and then lead the way to a brighter tomorrow. Once you take a stand, it emboldens you to do it again... and again, and again.

Young people today have an even greater challenge -- the powerful fossil fuel industry, with its complicated web of interdependency with the military. Those in this book are risking everything to wake us up. We all, especially world leaders, must listen to them and heed their call.

