

# Dr. Maya Soetoro-Ng

*This article is part of a series featuring APEC experts, available online at [www.uhero.hawaii.edu/74](http://www.uhero.hawaii.edu/74)*

## What drew you to pursue education as a field of study?

It was really in part a selfish way to keep learning myself. I really had, and continue to have, such curiosity. I thought, how wonderful to have a career to keep learning through teaching, finding new pathways, developing new understanding, and hearing the voices of rising generations. I can continue to grow and keep my life interesting and vibrant, as opposed to thinking of the educational profession as one that requires simply the mechanics of teaching. I really think of it as a creative endeavor that is about constant renewal and continuing to build vision, and to name ourselves, not only as individuals and as a community, but also as a nation, or world, in the larger sense.

## How can the education of women lead to peace in the world?

I think that education is critical for peace, because it is the only place where we, with full intent and high expectation, go to challenge preconceived notions; a place where we are forced to engage in dialogue with, if we are lucky, one another in a diverse way. But even if we live in a community that is less than diverse, we are still engaging with other voices,

## ABOUT DR. SOETORO-NG

Dr. Maya Soetoro-Ng is the daughter of Dr. S. Ann Dunham and Lolo Soetoro and holds a Ph.D. in international comparative education from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.

Dr. Soetoro-Ng supports peace-building efforts locally, as well as internationally. She is publishing a peace education guidebook for parents and educators to expand the horizon of community-led educational efforts. The book, which chronicles a class she taught at Honolulu's La Pietra: Hawaii's School for Girls, draws insight from organizations that advocate non-violent conflict resolution and mediation.

Dr. Soetoro-Ng currently lives in Honolulu with her husband, Konrad Ng, an assistant professor at the



University of Hawai'i at Manoa's Academy of Creative Media, and their two daughters, Suhaila and Savita.

and other visions of the world through literature, language, and philosophy. Through these things, we find other parts of ourselves and we find lives that are like ours in some way, but that belong to people who reside very far away. I think those exercises and explorations that happen when one is a student and an educator are essential that we stay flexible and that we don't divide the world into us and them, and don't become rigid in our thinking to the point that we deny the truths of others and think of others as being somehow either less

than or so very different from us. I think that the education of women, who globally are underrepresented at the decision-making table is essential. And I think that women carry a perspective that is still too seldom seen. If we include the voices of women who have been empowered to speak through education, we will be more nuanced and brave in finding solutions for peace.

**What are your thoughts on women and the economy and how can microloans, your mother Ann Dunham's area of research, increase the level of peace in the region/world?**

Mom was very interested in the things that, not only individuals, but small groups, could do to fortify and sustain the economy and to lift up a peoples and perhaps a nation. Most of the people in cottage industries are women. They are women who, like women everywhere, are interested in being able to support their children, have a little more autonomy, and greater choice in ushering their children into the future. They are women who want to feel empowered in their communities and want greater opportunities for their children. Although Mom worked with blacksmiths who were predominantly men, she saw microfinance generally benefiting women because most of the cottage industries are headed up by women and most of the handicrafts are made by women. When she worked to expand microfinance, she saw that as a feminist endeavor. The truth is there is not parity, especially worldwide, between the kinds of salaries that men and women earn. In terms of larger businesses, the number of men greatly overwhelm women, but at the grassroots level, women outnumber men. Although the desire is simply to take care of their families, these women are also inadvertently supporting the economy by diversifying it.



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*Dr. Soetoro-Ng reads from her book "Ladder to the Moon". The book was inspired by her daughter Suhaila's questions about her late grandmother S. Ann Dunham.*



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*Author and educator, Dr. Maya Soetoro-Ng with APEC intern Kathy Aldinger*