

# **LATIN AMERICA - Region is Next destination for Gaïa Assoc., a Non-Profit aiming at providing educational supplies and fostering cultural exchanges**

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Thursday 2 July 2009, by [Julie Verbert](#)

York, United Kingdom - June 30, 2009.

As part of their developmental aid project, launched in 2001 to help children in developing countries, Gaïa Assoc. will be visiting Peru and Guatemala in August 2009. Gaïa Assoc. is currently traveling around the world in order to provide local schools with educational supplies and to foster cultural exchanges among various countries.

The first project carried out by what was to become Gaïa Assoc. took place in Vanuatu, Oceania, in 2003. Through this humanitarian initiative, several French students brought games, books, copybooks, pens, paints, etc. to a secondary school located in Lowanatum and a primary school in Lamlu. These educational supplies enabled the development of a library for the secondary school as well as the creation of a play area within the primary school. In these new facilities, the volunteers organized educational and recreational animation based on manual activities and team sports. This project was a triumph. All organizers became very popular in the villages and received extremely positive and encouraging feedback both on the field and in France.

Following this enriching and fruitful experience, Gaïa Assoc. was created in 2003 - with a very clear goal: to get further involved in international assistance. Four French young women are now responsible for the preparation, organization and implementation of all projects: Marion Bonte, President; Camille Blanc, Vice-President; Axelle Spentchian, Treasurer; and Cécile Delaittre, Secretary.

In 2004, Gaïa Assoc. successfully launched another project, this time in a village called Olgiy, in the Aimag Uvs area of Western Mongolia. This new enterprise targeted the 600 pupils of a secondary and primary school. At the beginning of this mission, all children benefited from educational supplies and were granted a computer, two blackboards, as well as various games gathered in France. In addition, educational and recreational activities were created throughout this two-month program much to the delight of both the pupils and the organizers.

Once back in France, Marion, Camille, Axelle and Cécile decided to undertake a new project, at an even larger scale. Gaïa Assoc. has thus decided to extend its travel around the world, to include the following, in order eastward: France, India, Cambodia, Indonesia, Vanuatu, Peru, Guatemala, France, Burkina Faso and Mali. They are currently in Indonesia and will be heading for Latin America to embark upon new adventures.

The concept of this new project is to reinforce and foster cultural exchanges among the nine countries divided into three phases. The first phase from January to December 2008 consisted in increasing awareness of the project's scope within French schools, more precisely in the Isere region. The activities will be devoted to the discovery of new countries around the world with a special focus on games. Children will have the chance to create objects symbolizing fairy tales and legends in France, to be sent to their pen pals abroad. The second phase is taking place on the field, from February 2009 to January 2010.

It aims at reinforcing the links established with the schools where the previous projects were developed and to create strong relationships with new schools. Gaïa Assoc. will organize recreational and cultural activities for children to learn about the other countries involved in this project. The Gaia staff will give the artwork made in France to the local children and help them make their own artwork for their pen pals. They will also collect an ensemble of legends and fairy tales selected by the children, to be transmitted throughout the mission. The third and last phase will start in February 2010, after the trip. It will consist of maintaining the global pen pal network among children from all schools within the nine countries. Feedback, comments and testimonies will be shared in the schools in France.

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### **About Gaïa Assoc.**

Gaïa Assoc. is a non-profit association created in 2003 by four young French women aiming at implementing solidarity projects in various developing countries.

Members of Gaïa Assoc.:

Marion Bonte, President - Tourism Representative (age 25)

Camille Blanc, Vice-President - Consultant in Organizational Management (age 25)

Axelle Spentchian, Treasurer - School Teacher (age 24)

Cécile Delaittre, Secretary - Student in Communications (age 24)

Alexis Blondin, Webmaster (age 28)

For more information, please visit: <http://gaia.assoc.free.fr/> or <http://www.gaiaassoc.com/>