



Trees restoring land and hope



Tony Rinaudo speaks at Caux alongside Luc Gnacadja former UNCCD Executive Secretary

While the climate change debate heats up prior to this year's Paris summit, Initiatives of Change International has embraced restoration of land, lives and peace as one of its global 'common actions'.

In Switzerland last month, Ron Lawler spoke on behalf of the International Council of IofC, welcoming the mix of policy makers, environmental field workers, subsistence farmers and academics to the 3rd Caux Dialogue on Land and Security, held in collaboration with the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). Alongside him was Rear Admiral Neil Morisetti, the former UK Climate and Energy security envoy, who maintains that 'increasingly the security community is... recognising that environmental risk is as much a threat to national security as to human security'.

Lawler, who comes from Wagga Wagga, sees it more fundamentally as a relational and moral issue. Two decades' experience in planning and delivery of programs for Aboriginal Australians had led him to conclude that 'listening to the land and listening to the people go hand in hand'.

'IofC encourages a quality of listening to those inner, insistent thoughts that come to us in quiet,' said Lawler. 'We may have to put aside our electronic gadgets or other

preoccupations long enough to be able to discern the thoughts that come.' This, and 'purity of motivation and integrity' are keys to developing 'resilience in communities and nations' to remedy the crisis.

Tony Rinaudo, from World Vision Australia, and his wife, Liz, were there with two World Vision colleagues from Africa - and with extraordinary stories of resilience and restoration to tell. In Niger alone, five million hectares of degraded farmland has been reclaimed through Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration, a low-cost technique to combat poverty and hunger among poor subsistence farmers. See www.fmrhub.com.au

Rinaudo's efforts at reforestation in Niger initially met with dismal failure. Overwhelmed and despairing, he told how 'a solution came as an answer to prayer. Our attention was drawn to desert bushes which we had ignored as useless.'

Veteran British environmental reporter Geoffrey Lean tells the story in his *Daily Telegraph* report from Caux: 'The bushes turned out to be clusters of shoots from the buried stumps of long-felled trees, whose root systems still drew water and nutrients from far beneath the arid soil. The shoots could never grow much before being cut or eaten by livestock, but when Rinaudo pruned them down to a single stem and kept the animals away, they shot up into substantial trees within four years.

'As the trees grew, so did crops. And as local farmers began reaping good harvests, neighbours and visitors followed suit. Now, two decades later, some 200 million trees have been regenerated in this way... enabling the growing of enough extra grain to feed 2.5 million people... All this helps combat climate change. The Sahel's regenerated trees can take 30 tonnes of CO₂ out of the atmosphere per hectare.'

The link with peace is obvious. Many of the world's conflicts are in areas of land degradation. 'You can do peace building till the cows come home, but if people are not able to feed themselves, the peace is not going to last,' said Rinaudo.

Immediately prior to Caux Rinaudo spent five weeks tracking similar projects in East African countries. Now back in Melbourne, he says that never in all his decades of experience in Africa has he been so consistently welcomed with hope. 'It is God's intention to have an Earth of abundance. In our destructiveness, we've destroyed hope. But wherever regeneration of land is happening, there's a restoration of hope.' As a consequence of the positive impact of FMNR projects, World Vision offices in Ethiopia, Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania and Kenya have taken steps to roll out FMNR across their child sponsorship program areas, potentially reaching millions of people.

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In all 23 Australians contributed to the Caux conferences during July and August (see www.caux.ch) Athalia Zwartz from Melbourne and Rob Lancaster from Canberra were responsible for training 59 Caux Interns. Margaret Lancaster coordinated room allocations, while Liz Weeks and Helen Mills helped manage the kitchen and catering.

Mohan and Daya Bhagwandas were on the core team facilitating the 9th Trust and Integrity in the Global Economy conference. Russian-speaker Peter Thwaites and his wife Rosemary were part of a dialogue between Russians and Ukrainians during the 'Just Governance' conference.

Victims of 'blind fanaticism' are creating common ground in Dandenong

On 15 July, the Afghan Australian Initiative was launched in Dandenong, Victoria. Its president, Nazer Nazir, formed the idea for this not-for profit as a result of the Life Matters workshop at Armagh, Melbourne, last January. At the launch, he thanked IofC volunteer Rob Wood for something very important to him – being welcomed and accepted into Australia. Nazer, who is doing a Masters of Law at Melbourne University, sent this report:

In honor of Ramadan, the Muslim fasting month, an Iftar celebration was held in Dandenong to inaugurate the Afghan Australian Initiative (AAI). The Mayor of Greater Dandenong and a State MP for the area were among the 200 people at the dinner.

Nazer Nazir, President of the AAI, outlined its objectives: 'To increase our capacity within our own community in the areas of language, laws, values and customs; and to promote mutual respect and... cultural dialogue through events that will bring together and create common ground among the many communities in this state of Victoria.'

'The disastrous ideology of extremism has no place amongst us since we ourselves are the victims of this blind fanaticism,' he continued. 'Terrorists have been killing our people every day in our country of origin, Afghanistan, simply because we want peace, say "no" to violence and believe in co-existence with diversity while the terrorists' dogmas are based on hate, rejection and violence.'

'On behalf of our organisation I would like to express our wish to play our full part in the ongoing development of the City of Greater Dandenong.'

Nazer also explained that Ramadan is the time when Muslims not only abstain from drinking and eating during daylight hours but also seek to strengthen their faith and restore any relationships that are not working well. At a community level they try to assist others and demonstrate a heightened sense of social cooperation and justice.

The Afghan Australian Initiative plans to host a wide range of activities, including vocational training to help positively redirect the lives of youth who have been negatively radicalised.

Life Matters continues its impact

The Life Matters Course, which was developed in Australia, is being used increasingly in Asia. As we go to publication, another Life Matters program is about to start in Sri Lanka. Rob Wood, the Australians who facilitated the last course in the troubled province of Mindanao, Philippines, writes of some of the feedback:

One week after the course, a major fire swept part of Pagadian city, displacing 4,000 families who saw their

homes go up in smoke. It was the worst such incident in the Philippines this year. Building on the relationships formed during Life Matters, the local IofC team offered support for some of the families worst affected.

Among the course participants was Dan, a sergeant from the local army base. Although older, he fitted in well and seemed to get a lot from the program. He also initiated a visit to the army base, where we were received by the camp commandant and other senior officers. Over lunch we participated in what was called a 'boodle fight'. Tables were covered with banana palms, chicken, fish and rice. I found out later this is a Philippine military tradition symbolizing equality and fraternity, as all members, regardless of rank, 'attack' the food with their bare hands.

This encounter with the army enabled us to hear from several officers how they see their role as basically a peacemaking one – somewhat different from the stories we heard from the local Islamic community.

The course had only been going for a couple of days when a Muslim student leader from the State University mentioned that he had just contacted his parents to ask their forgiveness for his negative attitude towards them.

Very soon after, another of those Islamic students from Maguindanao told us how bitter he had become when his younger brother had been killed in an inter-communal clash. But he went on to say, 'IofC has released me from my hatred.'

On the final day of the course, the two of them were joined by the rest of their group for a dialogue with our Pagadian hosts, who were all of Christian background. Dan, the army man, was also there. This conversation was something we had hoped for but was still a bit of a miracle, considering the level of conflict between the two communities and in which the military had been involved over many years. We hear they want to continue the dialogue into the future because they all genuinely want to find a way forward towards a lasting peace.

The young man who decided to forgive the death of his brother has written about the opportunity he had to share his experience with cousins whose father had been killed in a similar inter-communal clash. He said that by the end of their conversation they had also embraced forgiveness.

During the preparations for Life Matters there were moments of intense frustration when it didn't seem like things were progressing as fast as they should. However, time and again I was reminded of my need to have more patience and faith. I'm glad to say that in the end, trust won out. And as we look back now, we can see what a worthwhile venture it was in every way.



(from left) Daya Bhagwandas, Paul Ntoumos and Leanne Bunn talk with Council chair Andrew Lancaster

On the threshold of growth and development

Almost 60 years after Moral Re-Armament was incorporated in Australia, an Annual General Meeting voted on 15 August to change its legal name to 'Initiatives of Change Australia'.

Jim Coulter, one of the seven people who near the end of 1955 signed a Memorandum of Association to register Moral Re-Armament (MRA) as a not-for-profit unlisted public company, spoke at the 59th AGM about the heritage of the movement over decades. He recalled in particular how in 1942 Prime Minister John Curtin arranged for the MRA war-time review 'Battle for Australia' to be presented in Parliament House, Canberra, and for both Houses to be adjourned so that all Members could attend. Curtin's biographer David Day, in his 1999 book *John Curtin: A Life* (Harper Collins) enlarges on this in a whole chapter entitled 'Morally and Spiritually Re-Armed'. At that time the name spoke powerfully to a national and global need.

At the AGM Jim, a decorated WWII pilot, joined the unanimous vote for a change of legal name, and spoke along with Goretta Maguire-Nguyen, from a later generation of Australians, both advocating for Initiatives of Change's role and calling in today's context.

The change of name signalled a new period of possibility and development for this movement, still emerging from some difficult years of transformation and transition. A two-year Cultural and Structural Change process is involving a searching examination of its practices and decision-making processes, and is embedding new documented policies, processes and structures to enable Initiatives of Change to engage many more Australians. A national consultation under a 'Roadmap

process', over the next two to three years, will explore and redefine IofC's vision, direction and calling in terms, relevant to what is needed in Australia and the region today.

Setting the context before elections for the Council of Management, Mike Brown said IofC Australia is 'on the threshold of recovery and growth'. He pointed to the four-fold increase in formal membership (to 98, of whom 61 voted at the AGM or were represented by proxy). And to the three new candidates nominated to serve on the Council.

The election of these three, along with five serving members of the Council of Management who, in a normal rotation cycle were eligible to stand for re-election, was by secret ballot. All eight candidates were elected by clear majorities by members present, and through 21 proxy votes of those who were unable to attend.

The three new Councillors bring diversity and particular skills to the Council. Sri Lankan-born Daya Bhagwandas is a consultant neuro-educator, speech pathologist and audiologist. For the past six years, she has been a core team member running the Trust and Integrity in the Global Economy conferences at Caux, Switzerland, which is where she first became associated with IofC in 1985. Living in Melbourne, she is on the team which coordinates public monthly meetings at Armagh.

Leanne Bunn works for Randwick City Council in Sydney with responsibility for their Bushland Management Unit, involving

supervision of contractors and a large network of volunteers. She was introduced to Creators of Peace and Initiatives of Change five years ago by a work colleague, and has been part of the IofC network in Sydney since.

Paul Ntoumos, of Greek background, is a Melbourne IT consultant, to large and medium-sized corporations. He has been active in IofC's Cultural and Structural Change process from its beginning, and, with his wife Judy Greenberg, has helped facilitate Life Matters programs in Vietnam and Australia.

The serving Council members re-elected were: Penelope Herd, Francis Halim, Andrew Lancaster, Jonathan Lancaster and John Mills.

At the start of the AGM, chair Andrew Lancaster quoted the founder of Moral Re-Armament, Frank Buchman, speaking in 1949 about a 'definiteness of spiritual experience... (that is) observable but not joinable. You have to experience it for yourself.'

The future of MRA, said Buchman, is in 'the recuperative and restorative processes of God... occurring in the future, in different lives in different countries, with the outcome being illustrated in national circumstances.'

The future of Initiatives of Change Australia continues that process.



To fully enlist the ordinary person, is that not our aim?

At its AGM, IofC Australia looks to the future

Left: Jim Coulter and Goretti Maguire-Nguyen

World War II pilot Jim Coulter recalled the early days of Moral Re-Armament (now Initiatives of Change) in Australia, while Goretti Maguire-Nguyen, now a human resources specialist at World Vision, offered her thoughts on recent developments, at the IofC AGM on Saturday 15 August.

For Jim Coulter, the ‘experiment,’ as he calls it, began in 1940, two years after the international movement was launched in the East End of London. His own experience, as well as that of many others, saw MRA as ‘a pace-setter’ in post-war Australia. Jim recalled the words of MRA founder Frank Buchman in the period leading up to World War II, ‘We the remakers of the world, is that not the thinking and willing of the ordinary person?’ This challenge, to fully enlist the ordinary person, struck a chord with wartime Prime Minister John Curtin, who lent support for the fledgling movement to give a presentation for both Houses of Parliament in 1942.

Jim highlighted that the Australians who had sacrificed their lives in the war had been volunteers, not conscripts. He linked this heritage to that of immigrants who have undergone great hardship to be in Australia, and he looked back over MRA’s role in helping to heal others who have then taken the fruits of such healing to their homelands. He highlighted the role of ordinary Australians who have contributed to forging trust relationships within the region, for example, in building the IofC centre at Panchgani in India for ongoing work in training and reconciliation. He contrasted these achievements with current party politics in Australia, where the two major parties now ‘vie with each other

in restrictive immigration policies.’

Jim called on all concerned to ‘tap into the spirit of adventure’ contained in Australia’s immigrant heritage.

‘In sport, we say it’s giving your last 5 percent that makes the difference between winning and losing; can we all aim to be 100 percenters?’

To this day, Jim said, his involvement in the movement is something to be experienced, rather than reminisced about. Reflecting that it is now 75 years since he volunteered for the MRA journey with his wife Rita, he concluded, ‘Any potholes? Plenty! Would we do it again? With all our hearts!’

Goretti Maguire-Nguyen reflected on her involvement in training and activities at IofC while searching for meaning in a nascent career at Myer Grace Brothers that ultimately left her unhappy.

‘IofC, more often than not, appealed to young people like me who were at a crossroads,’ she said. ‘It saved me from a path of despair.’ She noted that courses such as Life Matters and Effective Living have changed the lives of many young people. ‘The ideas of personal reflection and moral growth resonated with me, but ultimately it was the principles and the people, their care and kind-heartedness, that kept me coming back,’ she said.

From an initial involvement in the Australia-Vietnam Youth Today network that met at Armagh in Melbourne, she went on to undertake IofC training, including a programme in India, where she met her now-husband.

After taking the Life Matters Course, Goretti took leave of absence from her job and gave IofC work a

go, in the face of parental opposition. At the time, she said, ‘Armagh was vibrant. I loved working with and being around young people... Lives were changed right in front of my eyes and yours. It was such hope-giving work.’

In her third year of full-time work with IofC, Goretti was appointed National Youth Coordinator. ‘The mandate was too great, the resources too few,’ she said. ‘And I felt that the season was changing for me.’ Having embarked on the faith journey through IofC, she was further drawn to tackling poverty in the world today, and moved on to work at World Vision Australia.

Goretti advocated for IofC Australia to focus on its competitive advantage, which she sees as its unique contribution to human transformation, ‘changing one person, one group at a time.’ While issues such as food security and climate change are important to human survival, she proposed leaving ‘the technical work to the experts,’ and focus on forming partnerships instead. Looking to the future, she said, ‘My hope is that IofC Australia emerges from the current cultural and structural change process with a vision and a focus on its core activities, and well articulated short and long-term goals.’

For more information about the AGM, contact Jonathan Lancaster, secretary@au.iofc.org

AT A GLANCE:

Australians taking 'initiatives of change'

As in the last issue, we report initiatives by people across Australia – some ongoing programs, others simply community conversations. *Newsbriefs* would welcome hearing about such regular conversations and meetings.

In Sydney's inner-city Surry Hills, a very multicultural mix of 12-15 people come together monthly for 'Table Talk' at 'a funky Surry Hills café', to connect and have 'meaningful conversation' to 'learn from each other and to see where it may lead us'.

Facilitated by Shoshana Faire and Roslyn Kennedy, the idea has 'really taken off' over the last three years.

Shoshana and Tanya Fox are also working with the Sydney Alliance in their campaign on 'Changing the Conversation about Asylum Seekers'. This gives members of civil society an opportunity to engage with the real stories of asylum seekers, to build relationships by meeting them face to face in a safe space.

In Port Elliot, SA, Jean Brown and neighbours started monthly 'Community Conversations' round a fire with a bowl of soup in a local café, sharing each other's journeys of calling and commitment.

They began with Brad from the Fleurieu Foundation which supports homeless people, largely unrecognised in this resort town south of Adelaide. This month the conversation was on India, after Mike Brown related about his years in Mumbai with IofC.

At Armagh, the IofC centre in Melbourne, the July Monday Monthly Meeting was facilitated by certified trainer, Ruth Newport, 'capably leading us into the world of Dynamic Governance or Sociocracy', reports Margaret Hepworth.

Using a 'fishbowl' role play with six members of the audience, Ruth demonstrated how people are more likely to accept a decision when every voice is heard.

She highlighted the difference between 'consensus' and 'consent', the latter being used as a way of efficiently moving forward when disputes or differences arose.

On Queensland's Gold Coast, Ella Luxton, Lyn Twin and Lesley Bryant have joined a 'Chai community' with local Muslim women following a very negative response to a proposal for a Muslim Prayer Centre in an industrial estate in Currumbin.

Lesley reports that two of the 'Chai cafes' have been held at her Elanora Uniting Church and that, through them, 'we are working with Muslim women to build bridges of understanding' assisted by a team from the office of the State Anti-Discrimination Commissioner.

Ella also reports that women who were part of a Creators of Peace Circle in 2010 had a reunion in July – 'reflecting on the positive impact the Peace Circle had, how it brought to each of us more joy, peace of heart and mind'.

In Perth, Caroline Edwards has been actively fund-raising to support Afghan youth taking part in IofC-linked programs in Kabul and India.

She met Mahboba Rawi at the Creators of Peace conference in Sydney in 2009, and was caught by her vision of training 30 young Afghans in peace-making and leadership.

Two Afghan women joined the Caux Scholars Program in Asia Plateau, India, last January and have returned to New Delhi, supported by Caroline's network, to undertake facilitation training to run Creators of Peace Circles in their country.

The training, set up by a member of the Tibetan Administration in exile, is currently being run by Jean Brown from SA.



Rosemary Kariuki-Fyfe (centre) and Yarrie Bangura (right) of the Baulkham Hills African Ladies Troupe. Courtesy: Lisa Tomasetti

Two African women living in Sydney, Rosemary Kariuki-Fyfe and Yarrie Bangura, were also inspired by the 2009 Creators of Peace conference. Using drama and music, they have shared their stories of hope and survival in adversity on stage as part of the 'Baulkham Hills African Ladies Troupe'. In 2014 they had sold out seasons in Parramatta's Riverside theatre and in the Belvoir, Sydney. In March this year, they flew to Britain for a season at the Southbank Centre as part of London's Women of the World Festival. On return, they performed in Sydney's Opera House.

'At first you are struck by the vibrancy and passion for life of these women,' wrote a British reviewer. 'But in between the moments of hilarity and music, interspersed with lessons on human rights and geography, you witness the horror that has led to four of those women becoming refugees.'

Originally from Sierra Leona Yarrie says, 'Being part of Creators of Peace has helped me to share my story with other Australians.'

Now Rosemary, with other African Australians has formed 'Women of Purpose', a network which 'cheers women forward celebrating identity and offering collective experience for all'. Rosemary invited other Creators of Peace women to the inaugural meeting on 25 July in western Sydney, as she 'wanted others to have an opportunity' to share what she had gained from CoP.

Listen – for a change



Some of the Creators of Peace team in Sydney: Zohra Aly is second from left. On the right is Ada Mackay whose discussion with Zohra about misinterpretation of our Holy books – the Quran and the Bible – led to Zohra being asked to write an article about Islam for the publication of the quarterly magazine of the Concord Uniting Church. 'Islam 101' was published in the last issue. Then Church members invited Zohra to answer questions after the service on Sunday 26 July. 'The question and answer session went on for an hour and a half,' writes Ada. 'Zohra and I agreed that we had built some bridges.'

'Now hear this: learning how to listen can be life-changing,' was the introduction given in Sunday Life, the lift-out magazine of Sydney's Sun Herald, on 5 July. The author, Zohra Aly, is national coordinator of Creators of Peace. Here are some excerpts from the article:

Research from the International Listening Association in America shows that about 75 percent of the time we are listening we are preoccupied or not paying attention. Immediately after we hear someone speak, we can recall only about half of what they've said.

'None of us is a perfect listener,' said Hugh Mackay, social researcher and author of *Why Don't People Listen*. 'When someone really listens well, it really stands out to you. When we look over their shoulder or check our mobiles during a conversation, we are telling the speaker, "I don't take you seriously enough to listen to you." Of course we'd never say it to them verbally, but our actions imply it...'

'Our prejudices and preconceptions act as filters when we are listening,' says Mackay. A person in a relationship who is not listened to is likely to feel insecure or sensitive. In turn, they are less likely to listen well in that relationship...

Sydney-based Shoshana Faire is co-author of *Everyone Can Win*, a book on constructive conflict resolution. 'Active listening involves tuning out from your own point of view and tuning in to the other person,' she says. 'It's useful in relationships and work conflicts to show empathy and let the person know you've heard their complaint...'

Niamh O'Connor, 24, took part in a Creators of Peace Circle program with Faire this year. 'Usually, I'm quick to jump in with advice,' she says. 'But the key points I had taken from Shoshana were to let people say what they had

to say and not to react or judge.'

She was able to use her newly acquired listening skills during a recent phone conversation with her 22 year-old brother. He had been an angry teenager and caused the family a lot of heartache.

'Instead of telling him what he'd done, I let him talk himself through his own memories of that time and kept echoing what I heard him saying about his frustrations,' she says.

O'Connor's brother opened up to her and gained an insight into his past behaviour. He apologised to their parents and has reconnected with them. 'I'm so proud of my brother because he came to a solution all by himself, and really grew from that experience,' she says. 'I feel really good too, because listening to him like this was more beneficial than anything else I'd done before.'

Top tips for listening

Stop talking – and don't interrupt.

Pause before speaking, or ask, 'Is there anything else?'

Listen to understand; you don't need to agree.

Listen with an open mind; don't judge.

Use body language to show you are listening.

Be patient and present; listening well takes time.

See also the Initiatives of Change Australia website:
www.au.iofc.org

Facebook page: [lofc-Armagh](https://www.facebook.com/lofc-Armagh)

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