



‘Shaping my direction for the future’

‘Last weekend, I had the privilege and honour of being a participant in the Life Matters workshop 2016,’ wrote Anam Javed, originally from Pakistan now living in Melbourne. She was one of two sponsored by the Islamic Council of Victoria.

‘This turned out to be one of the most inspiring and enlightening experiences of my life. The opportunity to learn from a range of “changemakers” – who spoke to us honestly and passionately about what drove them – has really shaped the direction in which I intend to proceed in the future.

‘It was a rare privilege to be surrounded by like-minded individuals from different faith and cultural backgrounds, and to form long-lasting bonds. The facilitators were genuine and enthusiastic, and enabled all participants to get the most out of each strategically organised workshop session.

‘This experience has spurred me on to apply for the Caux Intern Leadership Program 2016, where I hope to tap into a even greater bank of knowledge, motivation and life experiences. I highly recommend Life Matters, and cannot emphasise enough the impact it has had on me.’

The 15 participants came from ten national backgrounds, including one who had travelled from Indonesia to join the program, conducted from 22-25 January at Armagh, the Australia-Pacific centre of Initiatives of Change in Melbourne.

IofC Australia has offered Life Matters courses since 1995. Around 400 have taken part. A shortened ‘Life Matters workshop’, formed in 2014, caters for young working people.*

Misun Lee from Pennsylvania, USA, who is volunteering at Armagh, described the workshop: ‘Every morning we started with a “quiet time” where we would reflect on ourselves and our lives. Then we had many amazing speakers leading us into different themes, such as the

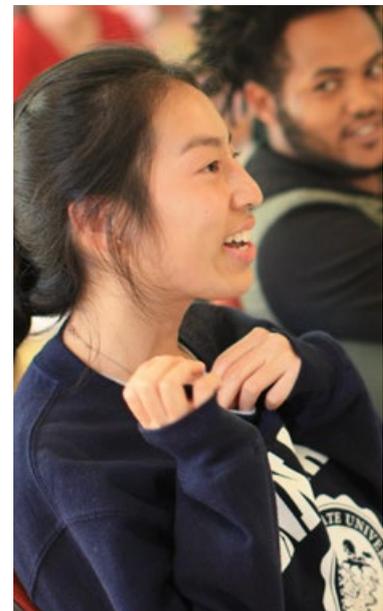


Left: Anam Javed: ‘surrounded by like-minded individuals’.

Below left: Participants and some of the faculty of the Life Matters workshop.

Below right: Misun Lee: ‘the conversations you have are so inspiring’.

Credit: Ruth Newport



“identity panel”, three Australians revealing layers of identity and healing. Story-sharing in “family groups” enabled each of us to connect personally. Exploring Change and Trust-building sessions led onto looking at Relationships and Forgiveness which included watching *The Imam and the Pastor*, a video on a Nigerian Muslim and Christian. The program introduced us to the idea that ‘Everyone can be a change-maker’, then helped us set goals, choices and commitment.

‘The people you meet and the conversations you have are so inspiring. What’s truly great about the program is that people from ages around 20-30 from different backgrounds become a family. So much separation and discrimination in the world is because we are too conscious of where people come from. That’s a big struggle we face every day, and it is simply because we don’t know that, in the end, we’re all the same.’

For more information, see www.au.iofc.org or contact Programs and Training Portfolio, cheryl.jean.wood@gmail.com



Participants at the Glebe dialogue

Aboriginal Australians call for a different agenda in 2016

Over several years, former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser arranged for selected Aboriginal leaders and activists to attend the IofC conferences in Caux, Switzerland, sponsored by the office of the current Minister for Indigenous Affairs. This was coordinated by John Bond, then secretary of the National Sorry Day Committee and later, the Stolen Generations Alliance.

John and his wife, Mary Lean, were in Australia over Christmas which provided an opportunity to invite those who had experienced Caux to meet together. Seven met on 9 January at the Glebe Justice Centre with John and Mary, joined by Graeme Cordiner, Ron Lawler and Mike Brown from IofC Australia.

As Professor Lisa Jackson-Pulver, inaugural Chair of Indigenous Health at the University of NSW, said in her 'welcome to country', Glebe in inner city Sydney has

been a significant locality for Aboriginal people back into history.

This was a chance to consider what needs to move forward in Australia's national dialogue in 2016 and what from 'the Caux experience' could help sustain it.

The 'open agenda' began to focus on three areas: Aboriginal health and child protection programs, Constitutional change, and the lack of any real listening to Aboriginal people.

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Losing our core sense of who we are as a nation

Graeme Cordiner spoke at the Glebe meeting from his perspective as a non-Indigenous Australian who has been part of a campaign for recognition of the Myall Creek Massacre in 1838, resulting in a memorial being created.

Here are some of his points made at Glebe:

From a spiritual perspective I see the Indigenous cry for self-determination as a fight for the soul of the nation, our soul. Many Aboriginal people are in pain, the canary in the coalmine. It is not hard to see today we are all in deep trouble.

The Myall Creek Massacre memorial group, with Keating's Redfern speech as context, seeks at every opportunity

to address our unfinished 'sorry' business, from the massacres when the blood went into the ground and cried out for justice.

Sorry. Forgive us. For what we did to you. For what we did to ourselves.

Our national dream of 'a fair go for all' cannot be realised without this approach. For, given what happened, the generous 'welcome to country' offered to us is nothing short of incredible. Only through their welcome can we truly belong, can we be truly re-connected.

This is not sympathy, not 'helping' Aboriginal people with 'their problems'. This is writing me fully into the story, seeing just how great

our spiritual need is, and how in so many ways Aboriginal people hold the keys, point the way; how they are central, yet forced to the fringes. In doing this we are losing our own core sense of who we are as a nation.

This is moving further than reconciliation, the time to make a national statement. This is the message from the Yolgnu Nations Assembly: 'It's time' - for recognition and self-determination. It's time for all Australians, so we can all move forward. Constitutional change properly done, embracing Treaty, would set us all free.

Dr Jackie Huggins, former co-chair of Reconciliation Australia, had spoken in Caux alongside Kevin Rudd during his visit in 2012. She is now co-chair of the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples, the peak representative body that replaced ATSIC. 'If only they would listen to our people,' she said, in some desperation, as the group reviewed Closing the Gap issues. Too often the elected Congress is excluded from the table in forming policy responses. The group discussed how authentic Aboriginal viewpoints could be better heard, at the national and community levels.

Dr Paul Gray, a Wiradjuri man working in the NSW Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat, focused on efforts to multiply Aboriginal-controlled community bodies 'which we know work' in addressing child protection and domestic violence. Paul was the first Aboriginal person to achieve a D Phil at Oxford University. His wife, Kirsten, assistant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Mick Gooda, spoke of her vision for Aboriginal 'community government'.

Debra Hocking told of an innovative program for Indigenous Trauma Recovery she helped to launch at the University of Wollongong after being at Caux.

Lorissa Minniecon, whose father Ray has championed recognition of Aboriginal ex-servicemen on ANZAC

Day, told of her 'awakening' at the age of 16 and being an advocate for 'Indigenous theology' among Christian communities in Australia and overseas.

Ron Lawler said how an Aboriginal neighbour had influenced him as a boy which helped to shape his calling to take up an NGO-management position in a remote community in northern Australia and, later, as deputy manager for a NSW regional office of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission. When ATSIC was abolished, he struggled to get past his anger – putting his energies into establishing *Tirkandi Inaburra*, an Indigenous organisation in the Riverina which has got hundreds of Aboriginal boys 'at risk' back on track in their studies under the guidance of Aboriginal elders. Virtually none of them have ended up in trouble with the law, bucking the national trend.

Following the demise of ATSIC Kirstie Parker, also from the Wiradjuri nation, has worked to sustain Aboriginal leadership. Now director of the National Centre for Indigenous Excellence in Redfern, NSW, she seeks to help her people recognise the 'excellence within', to access those inner resources built into 'our DNA'.

The heritage of self-governance over 60,000 years could provide a viewpoint for the debate on Constitutional change and the Republic, argued Professor Lisa Jackson-Pulver, now Pro Vice

Chancellor of the University of NSW. The present Constitution was formed by British colonies at a time 'when Australia had a vastly different demographic'. Rather than retrofitting it with amendments, a national debate could open up 'an opportunity to create a wholly new constitution, inclusive of all her citizens, charting our responsibilities and rights, within and beyond our borders, in the light of current challenges'.

This 'outrageously idealistic' concept was what most excited Gillian Brannigan, non-Indigenous Co-Chair of the National Sorry Day Committee and then National Coordinator of the Stolen Generations Alliance. Even if the issue rouses arguments, this would 'be better than the silence and apathy that seems to have stifled any movement in public consciousness' towards addressing 'the real and tragic circumstances faced by so many in this country'.

Summing up the day, she wrote: 'It was an unexpected and inspiring opportunity to take stock of where we are collectively, and where I am in this, to envisage a better future. I am still not sure what my part in this might be but I stand ready. The fire still burns within me for truth, justice and healing, embers waiting for fuel and an invitation.'

All present agreed the debate needs to continue, and possible steps were outlined.

– Mike Brown, Adelaide

Conversations about asylum seekers

Members of IofC and Creators of Peace in Sydney recently attended a fundraising event in support of the Sydney Alliance in their campaign for 'Table Talks to Change the Conversation about Asylum Seekers'.

The Sydney Alliance is a non-partisan coalition of civil society organisations working together for a fair, just and sustainable Sydney. Since its inception in 2013, over 3,000 people from different community groups, unions, schools and religious organisations have taken part in these Table Talk dialogues. Recognising the community concerns and questions around asylum seekers,

each Table Talk creates a respectful space for an asylum seeker to tell their stories, with an expert available to answer questions on the current situation with regard to asylum seekers. Participants develop a more informed opinion and experience of the human face of those seeking asylum in this country.

Both Shoshana Faire and Tanya Fox (with Creators of Peace) are actively involved in facilitating and coordinating the Table Talks, and can testify that these conversations are helping members of the community to be better informed on the needs of asylum seekers. Some have gone on

to work on campaigns to influence the government to make life better for asylum seekers; or taken action joining organisations that help with the settlement of those seeking asylum on our shores.

The Sydney IofC and Creators of Peace teams who attended the fundraiser found it 'truly inspirational'. They have ear-marked 10 April 2016 to host a Table Talk to Change the Conversation about Asylum Seekers.

– Tanya Fox, Sydney

South Sudanese: 'Let's stop creating hatred within us'

On January 23, Nyok Gor and Henry Makuei Koor flew from Melbourne to attend the launch of the South Sudan Peace Alliance in Brisbane. Nyok reports:

Like any diaspora community, the South Sudanese in Queensland have endured the impact of deadly ongoing conflict, which has brought suffering to millions.

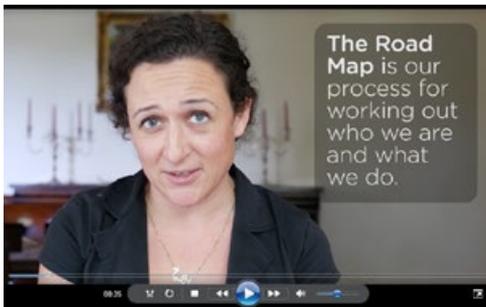
In March 2015, a young man from Brisbane was among the nearly 30 South Sudanese Australians from different tribes brought together in Canberra by the South Sudan Peace Initiative (which is supported by IofC Australia) for a Parliamentary Briefing of MPs on South Sudan's crisis. Inspired and encouraged by the event in Canberra, this young man, Ocholamero, got involved with a small group to form a peace alliance. They have followed up the idea in conversation with SSAPI members over the year.

Henry and I reached the venue near Brisbane's CBD as people began arriving. By the time the peace alliance was launched with a welcome by an elderly Indigenous woman,

about 100 people were present, mostly from Equatoria region. Both Henry and I were hoping to meet many people we know from different tribes. But we were not surprised that most of the Nuer and Dinka members did not attend, due to the sharpened divisions between them.

Following an introduction to the initiative by Ocholamero, various community leaders spoke. One elder warned: 'If you are a Christian you need peace with God, you need peace with yourself and with people around you. The role of peace advocacy is ours together, not just one person. Our responsibility is to plant the seeds of harmony and unity among our community here in Brisbane. Let us stop creating hatred within us.'

Our presentation of the journey of our peace initiative in the last five years created excitement as many have followed our activities on the South Sudan Australia Peace Initiative page on Facebook.



The Road Map and YOU!

After a 'Year of Living Differently' with IofC programs in Asia and Europe, Kirsty Argento is assisting the Executive Officer and a highly-experienced steering group in launching a 'Roadmap for IofC Australia', a process to 'discern and evolve our mission, purpose and calling'. She writes:

The Road Map process is almost ready to be launched Australia-wide. A never-before-seen video will be sent out to help explain how the process is going to work and, most importantly, how you can be involved. This is a call to inspiration and action, a chance not only to have conversations about your ideas for IofC's future but also to begin taking the next steps to make them happen. The video is just an introduction. Log onto www.vimeo.com/153734570 And be in contact with me, Kirsty at: kargentoiofc@gmail.com



Classic feature films available on line

Many readers will remember magnificent feature films produced by Moral Re-Armament in decades past.

Like *The Crowning Experience*, based on the life of Dr Mary McLeod Bethune, a pioneering African-American educator and civil rights activist who became an adviser to President Franklin D Roosevelt. And *Give a Dog a Bone*, a delightful pantomime for children by Peter Howard, featuring a dog called Ringo, a boy and his family, and a space-man who flies in to help them with their troubles.

Now some of these outstanding films have been collected and uploaded to an archive site on <https://vimeo.com/initiativesofchange>. IofC Australia contributed financially to high-quality digitalisation. They are available for free personal viewing, but licenses are required for non-profit, educational, government or commercial use.

Contact film.archives@us.iofc.org

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

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