



‘Proud to be Melanesian’

David Bunton, whose missionary great-grandfather John Paton campaigned against the South Seas “labour traffic”, has just attended an event in Fiji honouring the descendants of Melanesian labourers first transported to Fiji 150 years ago. He writes:

“Proud to be Melanesian” – emblazoned on T-shirts and other memorabilia – was the emerging sentiment during the weekend of 7-9 November around Levuka, site of the first Kingdom of Fiji under Chief Cakobau and then first colonial capital after cession to Britain.

The occasion was “FM 150”, a re-enactment and commemoration of the landing in Levuka in 1864 of the first 35 South Sea Islanders brought to work on Fiji’s plantations, 15 years before the first Indian indentured labourers.

Over a 47-year period about 27,000 came from the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu) and the Solomon Islands. They usually returned home after three years. Some, if they had a choice, preferred to go to Queensland where the trade was more regulated and labourers paid twice as much. Those who remained in Fiji became a marginalised community, the “Fiji Melanesians”, who were often required to change their names and cut ties with their islands and culture of origin.

Celebration

The FM 150 weekend was a joyous celebration of identity and culture. Beginning with a prayer at the landing place by Anglican Father Jeke Maikali, a parade through the town culminated at the Levuka Oval where there was a kava welcome ceremony and traditional singing and dancing. In the Town Hall was an exhibition of history banners and artworks created for the Australian South Sea Islander 150th commemorations in Beaudesert, Queensland, last year (see *Newsbriefs* December 2012 and October 2013), including works by FM artist Abraham Lagi, and Australian Helen Stacey. A Fiji Melanesian Thanksgiving Service on the Sunday afternoon included an

hour of spontaneous singing from Melanesian groups originating from different areas and islands.

Fiji’s Assistant Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts, the Hon. Vijay Nath, himself a descendant of Indian plantation workers, welcomed guests and expressed appreciation for the contributions of the Fiji Melanesians.

Vanuatu’s Minister for Lands, the Hon. Ralph Regenvanu,

represented by the High Commissioner to Fiji, Mr John Patteson Oti.

Selina Talemaisainiai, daughter of newly elected President of the Fiji Melanesian Council Joe Sanegar, is a third generation Solomon and Vanuatu descendant: “Our (fore) fathers did not come here by choice. They were tricked and forced into captivity, and then sold as cheap labour to work for plantation owners



Father Jeke leads Fiji Melanesians who re-enacted the 1864 landing in a parade through the town of Levuka. (Photo: James Muller, Earth Base Productions)

with the President of Vanuatu’s Malvatumauri Council of Chiefs, Chief Senimao Tirsupe, made presentations of traditional baskets and mats to representatives of the descendants of workers from Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands, and to the senior chief on Ovalau Island, Ratu Jone Davila, representing Fijians. He said: “The Chiefs of Vanuatu thank the Chiefs of Fiji for accepting our people into your lands”. He also made presentations to the organising committee and to Assistant Minister Nath.

The Solomon Islands were

on a land that was not their own.” She said that although their numbers have grown, they continue to be marginalised: “Today 150 years later, our status remains the same. Many of our people face eviction and land security is an ongoing issue. We live at the mercy of the state and the *itaukei* (indigenous Fijian) landowners.” She thanked the Assistant Minister for scholarship and project assistance to her people and Lesley Bryant, “whose passion for the Melanesian plight in Fiji has brought us to today’s commemoration”.

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Training of facilitators in South Sudan



Joseph Karanja addressing Training session.

Rob Lancaster from Canberra, part of IofC International's training team, was co-designer and co-facilitator of the October training program. This summary is based on his report:

October 2014 saw a month-long Training of Facilitators in Yei, South Sudan.

The 70 participants were drawn from all ten states of South Sudan and the disputed territory of Abeyei. They included nine of the trainees from last year's Peace Mobiliser program (see *Newbriefs*, June 2013). Most State Chairs for CNHPR (who are religious leaders) also attended.

Run under the auspices of the Committee for National Healing, Peace and Reconciliation (CNHPR) and South Africa's Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR), the program was the product of almost a year of discussion and planning.

IofC personnel from several countries made significant contributions.

Sessions looking at history revealed a deep need in participants to talk about the recent and ongoing conflicts in South Sudan which have undermined the peace process and brought death and suffering.

Part of the training program was to meet in "family groups" every two to three days. Each group (10-12 people) had representation from at least five different states, and some had one from every state. This diversity, in a space where there was the intimacy to go into more depth and journey with one group, proved to be a rich component in the course.

Two senior Africans who addressed the trainees were Letlapa Mphahlele (South Africa), a central figure in the IofC documentary *Beyond Forgiving*, and Joseph Karanja of IofC Kenya who has a record of working for social peace in his own country.

Principles

Karanja suggested three principles for the work of the "peace mobilisers":

1. It must be wholly positive in its approach. A campaign should not seek to criticise any individual or party. Give an equal challenge to everyone to take responsibility for South Sudan.
2. You must not seek to benefit personally. Of course you benefit when there is peace but do not expect any material or political benefits. It must be for the good of the country.
3. Sometimes in society you find people who have very strong inclinations towards a particular party or school of thought. Find a balance in including them and see, in your own wisdom, what role they can play. Include them in a creative way. Let them be part of the process.

The IJR offered a solid theoretical foundation for the action planning phase at the end of the training. Facilitators learned that when mediating a dispute they are not there to decide who is right but to help the parties find what is right.

A short documentary of the course is planned.

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Lesley Bryant's Samoan great-grandmother and British great-grandfather met and married in Levuka 125 years ago. Lesley had spent two weeks visiting Fiji Melanesian villages with Australian film-maker, James Muller, recording their stories. (One of their elders calls Lesley "our Ezekiel", referring to the prophet who brought dry bones to life.) Lesley writes: "The immense contribution of Fiji Melanesians is largely unknown, so it was wonderful to hear their stories of survival and to see so many happy and proud people

at the commemorations." James commented: "Many of the people we interviewed were recalling their family's history for the first time."

Donors

The event was well reported in *The Fiji Times* and the *Fiji Sun*. Mr Shailendra Singh, Senior Lecturer in Journalism at the University of the South Pacific, Suva, said it was "the biggest, most well-publicised event Fiji Melanesians have ever done".

Donors who funded the event, making possible the travel of Fiji Melanesians from other islands

and villages, included the Prime Minister's Office, the Department of Culture & Heritage, the Solomon High Commission Office in Fiji, the Chinese Embassy in Fiji and Lesley Bryant. Levuka resident Rowena Cavenagh worked tirelessly behind the scenes to assist the organisation of the commemoration.

COP Facilitation Training in Sydney

The lighting of a candle by Rachel Abi from the Solomon Islands launched a three-day Creators of Peace Circle “Training of Facilitators” programme in Sydney on 15-17 November. Rachel was one of ten participants coming from as far as Perth, Melbourne, the Blue Mountains, Wingham (mid-north NSW) as well as Sydney.

Shoshana Faire, a facilitator over several decades, led the three days with myself as co-facilitator.

Learning the skills to be a facilitator of Creators of Peace Circles is to engage deeply with the material and the purpose of the Circles.

As the days progressed, awareness grew that there is a “deeper why” to doing the Peace Circle and that a new realisation or transformation might occur that will have far reaching consequences, and deeper friendships and partnerships might develop.

During an exercise to practise the gathering point on Inner Listening, one participant got unexpected clarity on action to take over an issue that had been a concern to her for some time. All rejoiced with her.

The women want to share Creators of Peace Circles with others and to build into their communities. Through the weekend insights were gained into further ways to improve and implement the training of facilitators.

- Liz Weeks

Other Sydney CoP news:



CoP facilitation training in Sydney: Liz Weeks at left, Shoshana Faire next to her.

21 Creators of Peace women and one man (husband of the host!) met with Omnia Marzouk, IofC International President, on

the last night of her recent Australian trip. Omnia talked about the global directions of IofC, her own role and what motivates her and responded to questions.

A CoP Peace Circle was held in October in the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies at Sydney University. It is the second one to be held there this year.

- Shoshana Faire

Young Afghans for Scholars Program

Since 2011 twelve young Afghan men from various tribal groups have travelled to Asia Plateau (India) to take part in its intern program. On their return they have continued to meet together and to deliver what they have learnt to many gatherings and groups of young people.

This year one of them, Shair Ahmad Azizi, was able to go to Switzerland to take part in a one-month graduate program in peacemaking, the Caux Scholars Program (CSP) at IofC’s world centre.

He writes: “This was a very important milestone in my life. CSP brought us the world’s hotspot conflicts under one roof, including Israel/Palestine, Afghanistan, Ukraine, Africa, to see possible ways to transform these conflicts into peace... I have started to organise sessions on leadership and peacebuilding for school and university students... I am helping with CSP at Asia Plateau with the help of Afghanistan’s Youth Peace National Council.

Two girls will go who are studying law and political science. Such youth will help us to strengthen our work as peacebuilders for the future of Afghanistan.”

At the end of December a Caux Scholars Program is being offered for the first time at Asia Plateau. The two female students from Kabul have been accepted to attend if they are able to raise their fares and fees, totalling US\$4,000.

If you have an idea how to raise this, or wish to make a contribution, please contact Caroline Edwards at cedwards@tpg.com.au

Details of the program are at: in.iofc.org/caux-scholars-program-asia-plateau

- Jane Mills

Australian intern at Asia Plateau

Three months since I arrived in Panchgani winter has set in and the nights have become chilly!

My days are busy with inner development sessions in the mornings and working on IofC programs in the afternoon.

There has been a Caux Initiatives for Business conference with delegations from Japan and India. Still to come are the impending Farmers Dialogue, Indian Caux Scholars Program and the Just Governance Dialogue in February.

Working with twelve interns from eight countries has taught me about patience and tolerance. Having group

Quiet Time has helped us communicate with each other honestly and openly. My practice of Quiet Time every day is having an impact on the person I am becoming.

We have started giving IofC sessions to university students who come here for regular four-day programs, as well as to young village men at Grampari.

- Kirsty Argento

Valedictory note: looking forward

This will be my last issue as an editor of Australian IofC *Newsbriefs* - a moment to look back and forward.

Newsbriefs was started several decades ago as an informal newsletter across the IofC network, then evolved into IofC Australia's regular public news bulletin. For the last three years it has been available on line, increasing public access.

As one of a rotating team of editors I discovered that editing *Newsbriefs* (and this will apply in the future to our website editor) is part of the leadership of IofC work. Working with contributors on how a report is most effectively written, or an experience conveyed, or a thought developed, helps to enrich as well as sharpen the message IofC gives as well as keeping our own minds fresh.

Reaching the public with our message and news not only builds confidence, support and participation but is part of public accountability. This echoes scientist Michael Faraday's recipe for achievement: "Work. Finish. Publish."

IofC Australia is at a moment of major transition. Its work has been carried for the last couple of decades by members of the "baby boom" generation, now in the latter part of their working lives.

With the handover to a new generation comes the challenge of renewal.

Unceasing conversation

IofC is not essentially an activity but an approach to any activity and to life itself (this can continue in retirement!). The "work" of the organisation or association, however, is to offer this approach in dialogue with the wider society, both teaching and learning. As a "matrix" of this approach each generation, and each person, relies on a thought-world where life experiences interact with fundamental values. Each generation and person brings new experiences and has to reappraise the fundamental values in order to own them authentically. To pass on the work to a new generation inevitably means to entrust it to a new thought-world.

Around the world there is an unceasing moral and spiritual conversation. It is heard in all societies, perhaps particularly in the media of open societies like Australia. It offers high points and low points, some confusion and decay, but also discoveries, breakthroughs and inspiring examples. Whether it is Generation X, Y or Z, we can look forward to new phases in the moral and spiritual conversation where some old values wither, others are rediscovered and reapplied, and important new values become evident.

Meanwhile the core of IofC, I suggest, remains as a foundation and a starting point to which people can return. That core as I have received it is a belief in the importance of the miracle of life, the thought that a mysterious but loving force is behind the creation, and the experience that calling, direction and the best in ourselves can be discovered in silent, trusting, undefensive reflection. This continuing discovery may do more than anything else to "remake the world" (Buchman).

- Peter Thwaites

South Africa: 'Freedom our responsibility'

The Lyndi Fourie Association International collaborated with Initiatives of Change South Africa to hold an international conference in September in Bloemfontein with the theme "Freedom - our responsibility". Australians were among the 150 who attended.

The conference was opened by Prof. Jonathan Jansen, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of the Free State (UFS). "The UFS is pioneering new approaches between people who have different views of history", commented Daya Bhagwandas from Melbourne. She contributed two workshops on empowering the human and spiritual potential through understanding the Human Evolutionary Matrix.

Aboriginal Pastor Ray Minniecon and John Bond addressed the conference on their involvement in the Sorry Day initiatives, leading to the National Apology in 2008 to the survivors of the Stolen Generation. "Delegates were intrigued with the way in which Australian politics has dealings with Australia's First Nations people," Pastor Minniecon reported.

NZ 'Life Matters'

In September IofC New Zealand conducted a three-day Life Matters Workshop at Wainuiomata, near Lower Hutt and Wellington. Six NZ participants were joined by one from Cambodia and two from Fiji.

Rob and Cheryl Wood went from Australia to facilitate, assisted by Daniel Haile-Michael. The program was enriched by local speakers who discussed values, identity and being a change-maker. There were personal decisions regarding forgiveness, improving particular relationships and practising quiet time.

The next Life Matters Workshop will be held on 23-26 January 2015 at Armagh, the IofC centre in Melbourne. Applications and enquiries to: rob.wood@iofc.org OR elisse_higginbotham@hotmail.com

IofC Australia has a new upgraded website.

Check it out: www.au.iofc.org

To request email alerts for Newsbriefs online, please contact Viv at E-mail: armaghoffice@dodo.com.au

Newsbriefs is published by Initiatives of Change (Moral Re-Armament ABN 22 004 350 789) www.au.iofc.org

Newsbriefs can also be read online at: www.au.iofc.org/newsbriefs

This issue edited by Peter Thwaites. Contributions, news and comments welcome.

Next deadline Monday 26 January 2015. To The Editor, NEWSBRIEFS, 65 North Terrace, Port Elliot, SA 5212 E-mail: mike.brown@iofc.org

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