

Kenyan anti-corruption campaigner visits Solomons

By David Mills, recently in the Solomon Islands

Joseph Karanja, the Kenyan lawyer who initiated the Clean Election Campaigns in his country, has just spent two weeks in the Solomon Islands.

He was interviewed on national radio, and then the radio station broadcast a round-table discussion between him and a group of young Solomon Islanders on urgent issues facing young people.

Transparency Solomon Islands hosted a public forum for him at the University of the South Pacific, attended by 100 people. The main daily newspaper, *The Solomon Star*, ran a three-quarter page interview entitled 'Go for Gold'.

'Clean election campaigns are not aimed at getting rid of certain political groups or politicians,' Karanja said. 'A good parliamentarian is someone who works with people and transforms their lives. I want to see Solomon Islands going for gold and becoming an

economic powerhouse in this region.'

This was Karanja's second visit. Last year he attended the *Winds of Change* conference in Honiara, where his experience inspired many young people to come together and launch a Clean Election Campaign for the Solomons.

New hope

Their campaign reached right across this many-island country. Thousands of people pledged that they would not be part of any electoral corruption. Many found hope that a new standard could be set in the election of their leaders.

However, when the newly-elected parliament chose a new Prime Minister, the man they chose was seen as having been elected with the connivance of particular business interests. Riots broke out, and much of Honiara's Chinatown was torched. Within days the parliament

elected another Prime Minister.

Though life seems back to normal, the riots were a reminder of latent frustrations and resentments, especially amongst the youth, many of whom are unemployed.

The young *Winds of Change* volunteers are now planning for their next action towards bringing change to their country. A number of organisations have asked their help in training their staff in ethics. These volunteers invited Karanja and my wife Jane and myself to come and join two weekend retreats – a chance to deepen relationships between themselves and plan for the future. We were joined by the Solomon Islanders who launched the *Winds of Change* conference, a number of them in prominent positions in national affairs. Three came from the province of Isobel where there is a growing *Winds of Change* group.

The need for reconciliation between disaffected groups remains a key issue. Two women's Peace Circles were launched while we were there, one in the office of the National Council of Women, and the other in the *Winds of Change* office. These are being co-facilitated by a lady who suffered greatly during the civil war. Since then she has been involved in many seminars and training programs. But this, she said, was by far the most effective and practical form of peace-building.



PHOTO: MIKE LOWE

Advice to Clean-Election Campaigners

Joseph Karanja had this advice for the Solomon Islanders active in the Clean Election Campaign:

The first Clean Election Campaign is the most challenging – after that you find you have an infrastructure and you know who your allies are. You can't just say, 'I want to be part of this campaign.' You must have a conviction so strong that you will do this whether anyone else comes along or not.

You have to be fit for this campaign. In many countries, the system thrives on corruption, and issues related to elections can be very dangerous.

If corrupt politicians believe that what you are doing will destabilise them, they'll fight back. They'll look at your character. We had to examine our own lives before going out. Quite a number of our team left. We had to put things right in our own lives. This campaign is

not only a way of helping the country, but also helping ourselves become better people.

The campaign should be ongoing so that we are ready when the elections are announced. After the elections there are other issues to be tackled – corruption and reconciliation. People need to see the country as an entity, not just their own group.

After the election we launched the Clean Kenya Campaign. Now we are launching a Clean Africa Campaign across the continent, addressing the question of leadership and conducting training programs.

Those of you who have launched the Clean Election Campaign have formed a strong team. You need to keep building that team, become friends for life. If Solomon Islands gets it right, the whole Pacific region will follow.

Joseph Karanja speaking in Collaroy, NSW, April 2003

AWB corruption and the lessons from India

Brian Lightowler, author of *Corruption - who cares?*, comments on recent high-profile Australian corruption cases and draws inspiration from firms in India who succeed in doing business honestly in spite of all the odds.

Australian Wheat Board executives are anxiously awaiting Commissioner Cole's report into their company's involvement in the UN Oil for Food programme in Iraq. It is a criminal offence in Australia, as in many first world countries, to bribe officials in other countries. Yet the Enquiry and the UN Volcker Report suggest that laws and international agreements cannot by themselves overcome corruption.

When the \$5.3 billion collapse of the insurance giant HIH was under investigation, Trevor Sykes wrote in *The Australian Financial Review* (14 Jan 2003): 'Those accused of breaches are alleged to have compromised what should have been their professional ethics and did deals and signed documents when they shouldn't have. These are human failings, but the whole point of being a business professional is that ethics and objectivity should surmount emotion.' In a radio interview Sykes was blunter, saying that senior executives needed an injection of ethics in their backbones. The former CEO of HIH, Ray Williams, and other directors are now in jail.

'No moral code'

In 2004, the National Australia Bank lost \$360 million in a corporate fraud scandal. Accused rogue traders Vincent Ficarra and David Bullen are now on trial. At the trial the Bank's treasury manager, Dennis Gentilin, said that when he tried to expose corruption at the bank's foreign exchange trading desk, a top executive 'blew his top'. Gentilin said the workplace was 'intimidating' and had 'no moral code'. The practice of 'smoothing' profit and loss, which involved falsifying the figures to mask the true market position, he said, was 'standard operating practice'. (*The Australian*, 3 May)

According to Transparency International's index of corruption, last year Australia was the ninth least-corrupt country in the world – though it is unlikely to keep that position when their 2006 index appears. India comes 88th on the list. But amidst India's corruption are some examples which suggest that that country may be on the way up.

India's largest software company is

called Wipro. It is determined to do business with integrity, and to pay the price that this exacts. The company produced its own power for 20 months rather than pay bribes to get a sub-station of the electricity grid activated, though this cost them dearly. And their staff face the same challenge. A junior employee in their Mumbai office travelled second-class and claimed reimbursement for first-class. He was fired. A senior general manager also inflated a travel bill. He was fired.

Delivering the Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Lecture in 2003, Wipro's founder and head, Azim Premji, said, 'We invested in uncompromising integrity, which helped us take difficult stands in some of the most difficult business situations.'

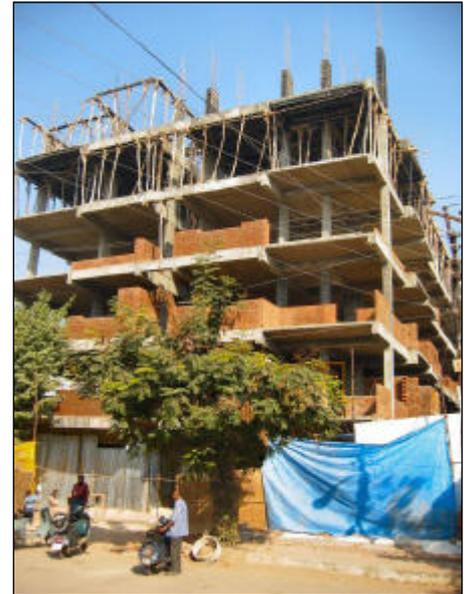
Alacrity Foundations, a construction company in Chennai, has an annual turnover of Rs1 billion (AUD 30 million). It has a 'no bribery' policy, says the company's founder, Amol Karnad, for two reasons. Firstly because it is wrong and secondly because 'bribes destroy mutual confidence'.

On completing their first building project, the tax authorities suspected Alacrity of fraud. Karnad says, 'When my auditor and I went to meet the official concerned, I was taken aback when he unleashed a barrage of charges: "All you builders are the same and I am not going to believe a word of whatever you have to say."

'I exploded: "If you don't want to hear me, send your inspectors to examine our records. They will find no black money involved. If you are still unconvinced, the next time your department builds staff quarters, we will show you that they can be constructed at the same rate."

'At the end of our dramatic meeting, he got up, took my hands in his and said, "I was once a communist, an activist, pursuing my own brand of idealism. Over the years, I have allowed layers of rust to accumulate within me. Please don't let this happen to you." I suddenly realised that if you are honest, you awaken it in others.'

As Karnad puts it, 'Not asking for a



A construction site in India

bribe does not amount to efficiency. There are delays. But since we have established a track record, we finally get what we want.' When Alacrity does not get what it believes it is due, the company takes the matter to court and has won every case. 'If we were to grease the palms of government officials, we would not only lose our sense of right and wrong but also, sooner or later, our sense of quality and responsibility.'

It seems that Australian business has something to learn from such companies. Otherwise we may see the fulfilment of the prediction of Mirko Bagaric, head of the Deakin Law School. Writing in *The Age* (27 Jan), he called for ethics training for corporate middle and heavyweights. Unless this happens, he continued, 'they will continue to pursue the profit line at the expense of nearly every ideal. Many of them know little about anything else. Thus the same pattern of corporate behaviour that is emerging in the Australian Wheat Board enquiry will continue.'

For further information, read the new updated 2006 Indian edition of *Corruption: Who Cares?* Copies specially available at \$7.00 post-free for *Newsbriefs* readers from either armaghoffice@dodo.com.au or tel: 03 9822 1218 during office hours or Grosvenor Books, 226 Kooyong Road, Toorak, Victoria 3142. Five copies or more are \$5.00 per copy.

Conference goes ahead in Jakarta

Next month the Asia-Pacific Youth Conference (APYC) will take place in Djakarta. Several participants in *IofC's Action for Life* program have been there, helping with preparations for the conference.

Sydneysider To Long Seng writes: 'During our time in Indonesia, I often felt that we were living hand-in-hand with the Spirit. We were due to be in Yogyakarta the day after an earthquake hit the area and the house where we would have been staying collapsed. Half the venue we had booked for the APYC also collapsed.

An answer to prayers

We spent the next week searching for a new venue and sponsorship, not knowing if the APYC could still go ahead. At the last minute, we stopped by chance at a venue in Puncak near Jakarta, which turned out to be perfect. It was an answer to our prayers!' During their visit they met with former President Abdurrahman Wahid, and he has agreed to give the keynote speech at the APYC.

Nigel Heywood from Manilla in

northern NSW writes of his gratitude at 'experiencing Islam through the eyes of these energetic and welcoming Indonesians... After the Bali bombings and attack on the Australian embassy in Jakarta it is important for me to work with these friends in building networks that are an answer to this violence.'

Roshan Gul from New Zealand describes staying with a Muslim family. 'With her round brown face framed in white cotton, she lays her prayer mat gently on the floor facing Mecca. I stir in bed, it is still dark outside. In graceful movements she completes her silent devotion to God. I fall back to sleep. It's too early in the morning. I awaken half an hour later. It is 6am and she is sitting beside the bed reading her Qur'an. Through seeing the discipline of prayer in my Muslim room mate, much younger than me, I saw my own lack of discipline in my faith.'

This has deepened our relationship and strengthened my own spiritual journey.'

'I remembered my father praying and fasting in Ramadan. I used to think his practices were dogmatic and impersonal, seeing my faith as superior. But through my new understanding of Islam I have

been able not only to admire but also to be inspired by my father's solid faith. This has deepened our relationship and strengthened my own spiritual journey.'

Meanwhile another Australian with *Action for Life*, Clara Cheong, has been in China. She writes: 'As an overseas Chinese coming to lands of my ancestral past, I have been moved to tears by the struggle and pain that the Chinese people have gone through. I have realised that Chinese people have been both victims and perpetrators of history and that it is our responsibility to heal these wounds together. It is our responsibility to let go of pride, fear, anger and greed so we can be open to learnings just waiting for us to discover.'

Sorry Day in Whittlesea

Reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians is one of the great tasks facing this country. Reg Blow is a former Chief Executive of the Aboriginal Advancement League in Victoria. He writes of a ceremony he arranged on Sorry Day at the Whittlesea Council offices:

The Mayor of Whittlesea reaffirmed Council's commitment to reconciliation and the recognition of Sorry Day and an opportunity for a healing journey.

I responded as the chair of the Whittlesea Aboriginal Reconciliation Committee and called upon our guest, Kutcha Edwards, a noted Aboriginal singer. Kutcha is of the Stolen Generations and told of himself and his three brothers who were all taken away from their parents at a very young age. The story had everyone spellbound, epitomising as it did the tragedy of losing contact with one's family and the struggle to link up with them in later years. I played the didjeridoo, then led the group on a journey around the Council offices. I stopped at three spots to provide an opportunity to say sorry:

Stop 1. For the loss of Aboriginal life, land and country identity.

Stop 2. For the incarceration of the whole Aboriginal race in missions or reserves 'for our protection'.

Stop 3. For the further loss of language, identity, cultural practices and knowledge on these missions or reserves.

We stopped at the flag poles, where the Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Australian flags were at half mast. We selected children to raise the flag while the didjeridoo played.

A circle was formed and a set of clapsticks was passed around the circle. Meanwhile, an Aboriginal person went around the circle clicking her clapsticks. This enabled non-Aboriginal people to make physical contact with an Aboriginal person.

We then all went back to the offices and had a cuppa, providing a further opportunity to get to know each other. A number of the group said what a moving experience they had found the event.

Transforming governance

A unique teamwork between Indian bureaucrats and industrialists to tackle 'the brutal killer' of corruption is featured in the current issue of *For A Change* magazine.

It highlights efforts to transform public and corporate governance being made by the IC Centre for Governance (ICCFG) – an initiative which grew out of a 2003 conference at Asia Plateau in Panchgani. In New Delhi during April, the ICCfG convened a national seminar on India's 'Right to Information' Act (2005) which gives common citizens the same rights to access information as any Member of Parliament.

Focusing particularly on problems 'at the cutting edge' where citizen groups are using RTI to challenge systemic corruption, the seminar was attended by six serving departmental Secretaries, directors of Public Sector industries and the government's Chief Information Commissioner. See www.iccentreforgovernance.org

Farmers dialogue

A Farmers' Dialogue was held recently in the Indian State of Jharkhand, North-West of Kolkata. It was initiated by a local farmer Shailendra Mahato. He attended a Farmers' Dialogue in Thailand in 2004, and invited Klaus Prinz, retired agricultural advisor to the McKean Rehabilitation Centre (MRC) for leprosy sufferers in Chiang Mai, Thailand, and Australian farmer Phil Jefferys to come and help him with a similar Dialogue in Jharkhand. It was held in Dorkasai village close to the rice farm where Shailendra and his family live.

Jharkhand is a new State created in 2000. A third of its population is of India's tribal peoples, from which Shailendra comes. He spoke of his dreams for the future of Jharkhand, his belief in the contribution of small farmers to the growth of Jharkhand and to feeding the people of India. Rice, the main food crop, is cultivated during the monsoon season. Shailendra intends to demonstrate in the next monsoon a new way of growing rice that uses less seed and gives a higher yield.

Over three hundred people attended the two-day dialogue, some coming from

To Caux after 62 years

Thirty-one Australians have announced that they will attend *IofC* conferences in Caux, Switzerland, this year. A university professor will come with two of her children and a granddaughter, having last been at Caux in December 1944 with her parents when she was a few months old. At that time the old Caux Palace Hotel was being used to house refugees - including her parents. In 1946 Caux re-opened as a centre for MRA (later *IofC*) conferences, making this the 60th anniversary year.

villages 60 kilometres away. The opening address was given by Jesuit priest, E A Augustine of the Xavier Labour Relations Institute in Jamshedpur. 'India boasts of a Green Revolution,' he pointed out. But to be effective in meeting the needs of all people 'it should be coupled with a moral revolution.'

'My interest is working with farmers,'

challenge.

In a fascinating section, he tells stories from Latin America, Africa and Asia, sharing experiences of farmers who, through a change in personal attitudes, discovered creative ideas which are benefiting their communities.

He points out that a large proportion of the world's population is farmers and farming is a way of life - it includes life, work, family and relationship to nature. It holds the key to two big issues of our time - closing the gap between rich and poor, and the stewardship of the environment. He argues that character rather than intellect will decide the purposes to which our knowledge is dedicated. We need a coming together of different cultures in a world enterprise to which the West is a contributor rather than a controller.

Elisabeth Ramsay and Joyce Fraser

Among those attending the session on *An Honest Dialogue for a Clean and Just Africa* will be Sudanese-Australian David Vincent, who is working to build understanding between Sudanese in Australia from the different ethnic groups as a contribution to ending civil war in his country.

Contributions towards the costs of those attending the Caux conferences who cannot pay their own way are welcome. Please send to *Moral Re-Armament*, at the address below.

writes Phil Jefferys. 'The needs of feeding people and caring for the land are challenging goals. India is a country that can demonstrate to the world ways of meeting these goals. Farmers have a lot of wisdom. Three-quarters of the world's poorest people are farmers and the question remains, "Why is there so much poverty in an industry the world relies on?"'

'*A Hand to the Plough* is a remarkable compilation of inspiring essays which show the path to sustainable human happiness and well-being. The last chapter on the unity of the spirit brings out the great importance of integrating science and spirituality. This book is a must for all those interested in fostering harmony with nature and with each other.'

Professor M S Swaminathan

Time magazine chose Professor Swaminathan as one of the twenty most influential Asians of the 20th century. The United Nations Environment Programme calls him 'the father of economic ecology'. He has chaired many international bodies including the Food and Agricultural Organisation Council.

A hand to the plough is available from Grosvenor Books, 226 Kooyong Rd, Toorak, VIC 3142, tel. (03) 9822 1218 for \$30 including postage.

Book talk

A hand to the plough

- a farmer's vision for the 21st century
by Pat Evans

This is not just a book on farming. It is a 21st Century perspective on the evolution of humanity and the onward march of science and biotechnology in agriculture. The author, Patrick Evans, writes of the need to shift our economic thinking to meet the changes needed in political and religious attitudes.

The title quotes Jesus' words, which express a commitment for life. And Evans' commitment to MRA/IofC for over 50 years shines through every page. He brings in others' experiences as well as his own, and stresses the importance of balance between science, economic structure, political thinking and spiritual

All contributions of items, news, comments are welcome. Next deadline: Wednesday, 22 August 2006, to The Editor, **NEWSBRIEFS**, 226 Kooyong Road, Toorak, VIC 3142.

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New subscriptions and address changes: **NEWSBRIEFS**, 226 Kooyong Road, Toorak, VIC 3142

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