

## ***Shifting the thinking of nations***



*(l-r) Peter Everington, Ron Lawler and members of the APYC committee meet Abdurrahman Wahid*

‘All believers believe in justice,’ Abdurrahman Wahid quoted from the Qu’ran to an Initiatives of Change group in Jakarta last month. Dr Wahid was the first democratically-elected President of Indonesia from 1999 to 2001.

The IofC group was led by Dr Habib Chirzin, Commissioner of the Indonesian National Commission of Human Rights. It included members of the committee planning the 12th Asia-Pacific Youth Conference (APYC) to be held in July this year in Yogyakarta. This is the first major public event of Indonesian IofC, and Dr Wahid will be the conference patron – though he quipped that he may not be a good patron because he speaks his mind. Sultan Hamengkubuwono X, Governor of the Province of Yogyakarta, will welcome the APYC participants at an opening ceremony in his Palace.

Also among the IofC group were Peter Everington, a British IofC worker who has taught in the Arab world and is fluent in Arabic, and Ron Lawler, a Director with the NSW Department of Community Services. They were hosted in Jakarta by Rozy Munir, a vice-chairman of Nadhlatul Ulama (NU), the world’s largest Islamic organisation.

Several of the group had been among the 38 people who gathered in Malaysia for an IofC World Consultation. One of the Consultation participants, Mike Lowe from Melbourne, writes:

‘Having attended three previous Consultations, this one was in a class of its own. First, because most non-Asian

participants had visited an Asian country before arriving, to learn from and support the IofC team there.

‘Secondly, because of the presence of respected Asian figures such as Nobel Prize nominee Sulak Sivaraksa from Thailand, Malaysian Islamic scholar and human rights campaigner Dr Chandra Muzaffar, Son Soubert of Cambodia’s Constitutional Council, and Indonesian

elder statesmen Rozy Munir and Habib Chirzin. It was moving to see the heart-connections formed between these veteran campaigners and the younger IofC participants.

‘Thirdly, the Consultation was special because of its agenda – “What is IofC’s role in shifting the living and thinking of nations and continents?” Dr Muzaffar’s talk in particular (see below) helped us focus on the great task of our age.

### ***Communications***

‘This vision connected with the other part of our agenda – how to better communicate what IofC has to offer to a world that needs it, but mostly hasn’t heard of it. Part of the answer is to regain our sense that the various initiatives we are engaged in – whether building better relationships at work or in the family, running training courses, fighting corruption, working for ethics in business, or running peace-circles – are part of an overall strategy which meets this one great need in the world – learning to live in diversity on the basis of foundational principles. In Malaysia we began to glimpse this and to feel excited about the possibilities and challenges that lie before us. Yes, we are called to help shift the living and thinking of nations and continents. Yes, everyone has a part to play. And yes, it is possible.’

### ***Live together or perish together***

*Renowned Islamic scholar, Dr Chandra Muzaffar, addressed the consultation. The following notes are from his talk:*

**W**e are at a critical juncture in human history. Cultures and religions are forced to confront/interact with each other, due to technological advances and natural disasters. For millennia we have been ignorant, prejudiced, hostile, and shed each other’s blood. The challenge now is: either we learn to live together on the basis of certain foundational principles, or we perish together.

What is the problem between Islam and the West? Is it related to religious differences or is there something else? At the level of doctrines there are great similarities. I suggest that the real problem is power. Most of the Muslim world was colonised by the West. Now the post-colonial world has a pattern of dominance and control in which Muslims see themselves as victims. Oil is the lifeblood of Western civilisation. Most of the oil in the world flows beneath the feet of Muslims.

What can IofC and other groups do? New centres of power are emerging, but on the same basis as now – economic advancement. This is why those who speak from an ethical perspective have such an important role to play. I would like to see China, as it ascends, reflect some of the values that are at the heart of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. That is the strength of IofC. You link the transcendent with values in a very universal way without going through the mediation of a particular religious tradition or culture. Zen Buddhists say we should look at the moon, not at the finger pointing to the moon. We have become too obsessed with our own texts and doctrines. We live by values because we believe in something beyond ourselves.

# Solomons Clean elections campaign taking flight on Winds of Change

Last month on ABC Radio National, Philip Adams interviewed journalist Mary-Louise O'Callaghan about the Clean Election Campaign (CEC) in the Solomon Islands. The interview began with a radio commercial which is now being broadcast in several languages across the country. 'Remember, you and your vote can make a difference,' the commercial states. 'If you want to change the nation, change yourself first. Together let's make this a clean election.' Adams commented, 'Isn't that great. The message is clear and there's no spin. I think we could incorporate that commercial into Australian elections.'

The *Solomon Star* of 16 March carried this story:

## Let's make it a Clean Election Have you signed your pledge yet?

*Solomon Star* examines the extraordinary impact the *Winds of Change* Clean Election Campaign is having on the country's voters.

They are small slips of paper, flimsy to the touch, printed only on one side and yet what they represent may be the most powerful force to hit the Happy Isles since RAMSI landed its thousand plus force back in July 2003.

Distributed by the *Winds of Change* as part of their Clean Election Campaign these pieces of paper are voters' pledges, each one the signed promise of an individual voter not to engage in corrupt practices during this year's election.

And right now they are flooding into the Honiara headquarters of the *Winds of Change* who have been carrying out a nationwide Clean Election Campaign (CEC) ahead of next month's general election.

'It's great to see people responding so sincerely,' says Clean Election Campaign Co-ordinator Eric Houma yesterday. Last Sunday Mr Houma was part of a CEC awareness team which visited Burns Creek SSEC Church to distribute the pledges and encourage people to think carefully about how they use their vote

'It was great to hear lots of women

especially contribute to our discussion,' he says.

Like most of the *Winds of Change* team of volunteers, Mr Houma has been astounded by the overwhelming positive response of ordinary Solomon Islanders to the Clean Election Campaign ever since the group ran a pilot Clean Election Campaign for the North Malaita by-election last year.

'In town and in the provinces it seems people are really hungry for a better way of doing things, a more constructive approach to tackling the country's leadership

problem,' he says.

It is also about empowering people says Christina Mitini, another of the *Winds of Change* team who has also worked on the AusAID funded Civic Education Project.

'What we are actually telling people is you've got the power to make change, to make a difference you just have to know how to use it. And not misuse it,' she says with a laugh. 'And, if you want to change things then you need first to look at yourself and what you need to change in yourself,' she says explaining the core philosophy behind the *Winds of Change*.

Based on a similar campaign in Kenya, the Clean Election Campaign strategy is simple enough,

through a media campaign and through provincial awareness tours, voters are encouraged to recognise the

value of their vote and to pledge not to sell it. If they'd like to commit to this publicly then they are encouraged to sign a voter's pledge. The wording of the individual pledges is simple and direct: The intending voter is asked to pledge not to 'accept bribes, any false promises, sell their vote or involve in any corrupt activity before, during or after the elections.' But they are also asked to promise to 'use their full conscience to decide their vote, listen to God to help them decide their vote and choose an honest leader.' The pledger is then asked to sign and provide their name,

village, constituency and province. Awareness teams have toured more than half the provinces, and are bringing back the signed pledges, like the more than 200 that came back from Ngela in Central Province last week.

People are also being encouraged to send them in or drop them off at *Winds of Change* headquarters at Kukum in the hope that a widespread and public repudiation of corruption may have an impact on the conduct of the campaigns of the contestants.

Those who have watched the *Winds of Change* grow, develop and sustain itself over the past two years won't be surprised if the Clean Election Campaign does have quite an impact. For the story of the *Winds of Change* is an extraordinary story in its own right.

A non-denominational group has grown out of a one-week conference in Honiara back in June 2004 which had the broad theme of exploring ways of healing the nation and restoring public integrity.

The Clean Election Campaign is the group's first major initiative, and really is the story of how a group of young Solomon Islanders decided they would do their best to inspire their fellow-countrymen to vote honestly and wisely in this year's general election.

With funding mostly from a concerned local businessman, the British High Commission and now

AusAID the group is made up entirely of volunteers, many of them USP students or young people willing to give

up their time – a lot of their time – to this cause.

'We think it is worth it, because we are doing it for our country and we may never get another chance to change the course of the nation,' said one volunteer.

Now with some additional funding from AusAID, the group have launched a media blitz for the final two weeks of the election campaign, using radio to urge voters in their own languages to make it a clean election, and the print

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media – including cartoon strips and posters – to explain how.

But the CEC won't stop on 5 April when everyone casts their vote. The second phase of the campaign will be targeted at the 50 new MPs urging them to pledge to reject corruption and participate in a clean election of the country's new prime minister.

'In many ways this will be an even bigger challenge,' says Mr Houma, 'but we are hoping with all those voters pledging to be corruption free the new members will have no choice but to do the same!'

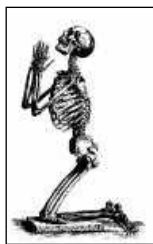
## In Brief...

### The Cross and the Bodhi Tree screens on ABC again

Following ABC TV's screening of the *The Cross and the Bodhi Tree – two Christian encounters with Buddhism* in 2004, FLT films received £4,000 in royalties for the sale of this film to schools and institutions in Australia in 2005. ABC TV recently broadcast the documentary for the second time. The FLT team is now working on a documentary on Christian-Muslim bridge building.

### Skeletons in Albany

Hugh Williams' play *Skeletons*, which deals with the impact of 'skeletons in the closet' on family relationships and the possibility of new beginnings, will be performed in Albany, Western Australia, by a local repertoire company later this year. Produced and directed by Mick Vertigan, it will run for a four-week season.



### Discover the Other workshop in Geelong

A team of seven presented a *Discover the Other* (DTO) workshop in Geelong as part of Diversity Week. Thirty people took part. The Chair of the Interfaith Network, Monsignor James Murray, said it was so valuable that he intends to organise a further workshop for senior school students.

## Interfaith gathering in Sydney

At the new Imam Hasan Centre, in the Sydney suburb of Annangrove, 120 people came together for a forum entitled, 'The greatness of Jesus for the Muslims and the Christians.' The Hills Muslim/Christian Dialogue Group organized the event, and Macquarie Radio's Gareth McCray facilitated.

Sheikh Jihad Ismail from the Centre and Rev Garry Derkenne of Castle Hill Uniting Church were the main speakers. Everyone sat round tables, so that they could get to know each other and discuss the theme. 'It was by far the best interfaith forum I have ever attended', said one participant.

## Farewell to a friend..

Jara Moserova died last month in Prague. Dr Moserova, a burns specialist, was the first doctor to treat Jan Palich, the Czech whose self-immolation in Wenceslas Square in 1969 stirred the conscience of the country. She was active in the struggle for democracy, and became a Member of Parliament, Senator and Vice-President of the Senate. In 2003 she stood for the Presidency, coming second to Vaclav Klaus.

*'do what you have to do to the best of your ability, and not tell lies, especially to yourself.'*

Dr Moserova found much inspiration in her interaction with the fellowship of Initiatives of Change. She was a Vice-President of the International Communications Forum, and attended most of its conferences. She often attended conferences at Caux, and her plays were performed there on several occasions. One of these plays was *Letter to Wollongong*, written while she was Ambassador to Australia.

'My credo was always to do what you have to do to the best of your ability, and not tell lies, especially to yourself. Of course, there are times when you delude yourself, when you ascribe better motivation to your actions. There were only two occasions when I intentionally lied in response to a direct question, and I haven't forgotten them to this day. I was no hero in the dark days of our history, but I never betrayed my beliefs.'  
(Picture, right, by Veronika Hrabankova)

## Sanctuary in the storm

Ingrid Rose Mowbray, a teacher in the Atherton Tablelands writes:

On 20th March Cyclone Larry roared across Innisfail, then the Atherton border. Our whole entrance porch was ripped away, and we could feel the 280-km wind trying to lift our cottage up. It was frightening.

*'It was inspiring to hear about all the people who kept other's spirits up.'*

As soon as we could we went out to inspect the damage. Our beautiful rainforest had been decimated. We found one calf half-dead under a fence, pinned down by a tree. After a few hours of warming and massaging it got up and walked. A new calf was born next door and was aptly called Larry.

It was inspiring to hear about all the people who kept other's spirits up despite their own tragedies. There were many examples of sheer guts and determination. The miracle was that no-one lost their life.

Recovery is slow. Trees take 20 years to grow. But we will remember how people helped each other. And that, in the midst of the mighty roaring wind, we had a little sanctuary.



*'I was no hero in the dark days of our history, but I never betrayed my beliefs.'*

## More from Life Matters...

**Christina Mitini, Science student, Solomon Islands**

The *Life Matters* course has broadened my view about the world. I learnt that spending time with God in quiet is a vital part of life. The program is open and I have been able to express some of my hidden talents. Friends from different countries have been a great encouragement. Also the outings in and around Melbourne are great fun, taking you closer to city life and into the world of nature. It has been a wonderful experience.

Now I am working with a Clean Election Campaign group in Solomon Islands. In preparation for our national elections next month, we are going to different islands in groups of six, with a campaign based on the linkage of 'good voter, good leader, good government'.

**Seila Hierk, Australia**

Over the years I have worked as a volunteer in community organisations. This led me to doing a Master's degree in Social Science (International Development) at RMIT this year. When

James McIvor spoke to the *Life Matters* course, I realised that only now, at 30, have I come to accept my identity. For many years I ignored my parents' Cambodian heritage. Only when I left home did I understand that it was a part of me. I plan to go to Cambodia next year to volunteer at a university and complete my course part time.

**David Vincent, Australia and Sudan**

When I heard the name, *Life Matters*, my heart responded. I came from the civil war in Sudan. Witnessing the loss of lives and properties, life lost its meaning in me. I was a very unfortunate human being.

After the nine days at Armagh, sharing our stories and background, I glimpsed what life is. Looking at my painful past helped me to uncover all that I had gone through and turn it into something precious. I forgave the people that had caused the pain. Immediately after the course, I brought together my fellow Sudanese in Melbourne, from North and South, and this work of reconciliation continues to take most of my time.

This year the coordinators asked me to be a part of the faculty for the course. I was very unconfident, but in my anxiety I said yes. Here I met an amazing group again who further inspired and strengthened me.

## Financing Life Matters

Twenty-two people took part in February's *Life Matters* course, and 11 stayed on for the two week Consolidation Course. The total cost was \$13,510. Many who came from the Solomon Islands, Cambodia, Indonesia, Vietnam as well as some Aussies were helped through gifts ranging from \$1000 to \$10. A full scholarship was \$800 and three of these were donated. In all, \$6,291 was received in gifts from 18 donors. One donor was a graduate from a previous *Life Matters* Course who, now that he is earning, wanted to enable someone else to participate. A Vietnamese lady in London raised money for both the Vietnamese and Cambodians participants.

*John Mills, course coordinator*

## War on Terror and Gandhian ethic

In November Professor Rajmohan Gandhi spoke at Edinburgh University in Scotland. A DVD of his talk is available. Vipulie Iralu from Nagaland, India, who is studying at Curtin University, writes:

'The fearlessness of Mahatma Gandhi and his fellow "fighters" to take India's struggle for freedom to a spiritual/moral level inspire and challenge attitudes today. Rajmohan Gandhi's lecture highlights his grandfather's as well as his own philosophy – the battles within hearts where truth and nonviolence is friend and intolerance/violence is enemy. This hope is urgently desired in the East and West, making a 'Gandhian' approach to today's issues highly relevant.

The DVD is available for \$15, plus \$1 for postage, from Armagh, 226 Kooyong Rd, Toorak, VIC 3142. Tel: 03 9822 1218

## Imams and Rabbis make a stand

*At a private meeting in the lofC centre in Caux Switzerland, in June 2003, the idea of a World Congress of Imams and Rabbis for peace emerged. lofC workers Christoph and Marianne Spreng have attended the various meetings, including the recent second congress in Seville, Spain, 19-22 March.*

High ranking Imams and Rabbis from 34 different countries met in Seville to make a united stand against extremism and violence.

The BBC news website reported that the speeches were, at times, 'brutally direct' rather than polite, diplomatic words. When the Chief Rabbi of Israel, Yona Metzger, harangued mainstream Muslims for not standing up to Osama bin Laden, Islamic leaders nodded in agreement. The report noted that both Muslim and Jewish leaders were prepared to take criticism.

Delegates made progress on issues such as educating people to prevent stereotypes, and sharing the responsibility

for respecting each other's sacred places. UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, wrote in support: 'The meeting can help chart a path of moderation for the devout, showing them that they can remain true to their convictions and beliefs while engaging fully in the changing world around them.'

Rabbi Metzger called for a 'United Nations of religious groups'. Imad Al-Faluji, Imam of Gaza, said that religious leaders had a different objective to politicians; to work towards a higher good. The senior advisor to the King of Morocco, André Azoulay, stated: 'Religion has been misused by the fundamentalists, who have taken over religion and made us hostages. They could do so because we were silent.'