

## Clean elections target Solomon Islands

From a report in The Solomon Star written by Mary-Louise O'Callaghan

“Ordinary Solomon Islanders have the power to solve the country’s leadership crisis”, the Governor of the Central Bank, Rick Hou said on Saturday. Launching the Clean Election Campaign (CEC), Mr Hou said every citizen eligible to vote had a responsibility to use this power to change how the country is being governed. “We cannot ignore this duty. We are all responsible and accountable to each other. No one has any excuse not to be involved in helping to correct the situation. We cannot be complacent, we cannot procrastinate, and we cannot continue to shy away, or shrug our shoulders when something is not right.”

Mr Hou commended the Clean Election Campaign (CEC), which is built on the idea of each individual voter playing his or her role in encouraging, supporting and voting for good quality leaders.

“You the Solomon Islands population will make that important choice. If you think the current MP does not possess ethical principles, is irresponsible, untrustworthy or not accountable, you hold the key to making a change.”

The CEC is being organised by the Winds of Change Solomon Islands, a non-denominational group established last year after a conference of the same name was held by MRA- Initiatives of Change aimed at finding ways of rebuilding public and personal integrity in Solomon Islands. The CEC is the first major initiative of the group and is run entirely by volunteers. It is a nationwide awareness campaign, which will be carried out through the media as well as outreach tours to each constituency ahead of next year’s general elections.

One of the Winds of Change core



Winds of Change Team sing about corruption at the launch of the Clean Election Campaign

team, Jasper Anisi, explained, “The campaign is based on the philosophy that to change the nation, individuals themselves must first change themselves and commit to living lives of integrity.”

The launching also included songs and drama that were used by the Winds of Change Awareness teams during their pilot Clean Election project during North Malaita’s by-election last year.

They hope to run the CEC in partnership with other NGOs and institutions. Already both the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Commission and the Solomon Star management have pledged to support the campaign as part of their commitment to rebuilding the nation. Anyone interested in joining the Winds of Change were invited to register for an introductory workshop which will be held on 5 June at their Honiara Centre.

## National Day of Healing launched

John Bond, Secretary of the National Sorry Day committee writes from Canberra

We launched the National Day of Healing in the Great Hall of Parliament on 25 May. It was a heart-rending event.

The previous afternoon our opening speaker, Christine Jacobs, had arrived from Western Australia with her 14-year old daughter Tamara. They were staying at our home. Christine went out for a walk, crossed the road, was hit by a car and killed.

At the hospital, agonised with grief, Tamara said to me, “I would like to give my mother’s speech tomorrow.”

Back at our home, those who were to speak in the launch were gathering for a meal, and only learnt about the tragedy when they arrived. What should we do? Aboriginal singer Ruby Hunter took leadership, and we resolved to give Christine a fitting tribute.

The next morning the Great Hall filled with 550 people, including a Cabinet Minister, numerous Members of Parliament, and 21 Ambassadors or High Commissioners. A senior elder of the Ngunnawal people, Agnes Shea, welcomed everyone, then invited Tamara onto the stage. She came, supported by Ruby Hunter, Professor Fiona Stanley, and Aboriginal elders Pam Yarran and Oriel Green from Western Australia.

Tamara began with tears, thanking the ambulance officers who had tried to save her mother’s life. Then, composing herself, she read her mother’s speech, telling of her removal from her family in 1967 at the age of two, the abuse she had suffered in a succession of foster homes, the hatred this gave her for white people, and her subsequent addiction to alcohol, violence and gambling.

Then she told of her turning point. A photo of her three children convinced her to start afresh. She went back to every family who had fostered her, thanked those who had cared for her and forgave those who abused her. Since then she had devoted herself to reconciliation, speaking in schools and other forums.

When Tamara had finished, the whole audience rose in tribute. “If someone your age can stand up here with that courage and inspiration,” said Senator Aden Ridgeway, “that’s what we need in the leadership of this country.”

Then we turned our attention to the future, with clear and heartfelt speeches from former Australian of the Year Fiona Stanley, and Mike DeGagne, an Aboriginal Canadian who is Executive Director of his country’s \$375-million Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

The following day, 26 May, over a hundred events took place, in all capital cities and many other centres, to mark the National Day of Healing. Some held a minute’s silence in tribute to Christine.

Brisbane conference 1-5 July 2005

## Together... Making A Difference

More than 20 Solomon Islanders, including senior figures from politics, business and banking, seven from the Philippines, and Ulamanaia Faaiu Sialaoa, the immigration official from Samoa who took part in last year's MRA-IC conference in Apia, have announced their intention of attending this Asia-Pacific gathering. Conference organisers also expect representatives from Nahdlatul Ulama, the largest Islamic organisation in the world, and the Indonesian Human Rights Commission, as well as a group of younger Indonesians.

Brian Lightowler, organising committee member, said that the conference would demonstrate a new way of working together which could offer in the future a new approach to a divided world. 'Already flashpoints of violence are becoming beacons of hope. Relationships broken by hatred, healed. And endemic corruption in retreat before the advance of integrity. The facts behind such unusual developments will

be demonstrated by speakers at the conference,' he said.

The conference will bring together a range of people in political and civic leadership from Australia, Asia and the Pacific, people who can speak from hard won experience of resolving problems in their communities and nations. Among them are Jone Dakuvula from Fiji, who on TV denounced the violent Speight coup against the elected government in 2000, with the result that coup supporters trashed the TV station, and Dr Mohammad Abdalla, an Assistant Imam whose mosque was destroyed in Brisbane in the wake of 9/11, a strong advocate of Muslim-Christian understanding.

Funds for the conference of over \$1,000 were raised through a performance of *Murder by the Book* by a Gold Coast amateur theatre group, arranged by the Elanora Uniting Church. In Adelaide, ten conference participants, along with many supporters, raised \$1,700 through a garage sale.

### News Updates

## Action for Life

*Yeon-Yuk Jeong, Nigel Heywood, Chris Lancaster and Clara Cheong report from their recent planning meeting in Canberra. Action for Life 3 - developing leaders and change makers for the 21st century - will run from 1 November '05 to 3 August '06.*

This training and outreach program is evolving. There is much to plan, organise, discuss, discover and work through, with many answers still unclear and a growing realisation of the importance of having faith in this process. The quality of the applicants is very high and it has been an honour to read their hopes and expectations, and hear their reasons for wanting to be part of this nine-month journey of learning and giving.

We are very grateful and extremely encouraged by the generous financial support that has already come from MRA-IC friends in Australia, two trusts in Europe, and a fundraising run in Melbourne. In total we have received US\$69,000 towards the budget of US\$245,000. All your ideas, thoughts and support on this are most welcome!

As well as India, South-East and East Asia, an *AfL* group has now been invited to visit Africa. While based in Kenya, we hope to follow up the U40s outreach last February. For more updates and the latest news, please go to the *Action for Life* website: [www.afl.iofc.org](http://www.afl.iofc.org) Our e-mail address is: [afl@iofc.org](mailto:afl@iofc.org).

## At a glance...

Following the Creators of Peace conference in Uganda in April (see last *Newsbriefs*) there have been three public report-back meetings to very multicultural audiences in Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney. It has been inspiring to hear of these African peace makers, and the challenge that peace must start from within. Further women's peace circles have been requested.

Religion as a force for peace: Rinterfaith dialogue and peace-building was the theme of the final week at a course on Religion, War and Peace at the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPACS), Sydney University, in May. Peter Thwaites gave a 30-minute guest presentation on the work of Initiatives of Change and answered questions from the international group of students taking the course.

Since the Muslim/Christian dialogue in the Hills District of Sydney last October (attended by over 800 people), the local committee has continued to meet regularly. One outcome has been an inclusive opening of the controversial Annangrove (Shia) Prayer Hall, attended by Federal and State MPs, civic and church leaders.

Devonshire teas, a sausage sizzle and a cake stall were all very popular at the recent Armagh Open Day, which raised over \$2,000 towards the operating costs of the centre.



*The Mayor of the City of Greater Dandenong, Cr Maria Sampey (left) welcomed over 80 representatives the city's diverse ethnic and cultural communities to a public launch of the "Discover the Other" program in the Council Chambers. Guests heard from a variety of speakers who illustrated from their own experience the four "keys to relationships": stepping out of your comfort zone; listening; focusing on "what is right" not "who is right"; and starting with yourself.*

# Fourth public Muslim/Christian dialogue in Sydney

What sort of ancestors do we want to be? This question was asked by the Premier's representative and Member for Canterbury, Linda Burney, the first Aboriginal Member of the NSW Parliament. It came at the close of a lively, at times tempestuous, evening when 600 people from across Sydney met to discuss Muslims and Christians – An open look at what brings us together.

Chaired by Stepan Kerkyasharian, AM, Chairman of the NSW Community Relations Commission, and welcomed by Councillor Robert Furolo, Mayor of Canterbury, the evening began with delicious finger food provided by the Muslim community and drinks provided by Canterbury Council. A local committee, meeting regularly since January, had arranged this occasion, representing the local Muslim and Christian communities, Canterbury Council, community workers and MRA-Initiatives of Change.

## Areas of commonality

Rev. Prof. James Haire, the President of the National Council of Churches of Australia, said: "A gathering like this is important because the initiative comes from the heart of the community. Theologically there are major differences between Christianity and Islam. They can be embodied in two words – Trinity and Incarnation." He then outlined five major areas of important commonality:

In respect and belief, we relate to 'the One who is beyond'. We are created, not for ourselves, but for the Other, from whom comes consolation, hope, strength, faith and joy.

We are both faiths 'in community' – we are not to be controlled by rampant individualism which is the scourge of Western society.

Both faiths hold family to be central. You cannot destroy that unit. It needs to be supported and expanded, not attacked or destroyed.

We share beliefs about the way in which ethical life is created. You cannot have private wellbeing and public squalor. There is concern for the common good.

There is belief in the gradual improvement of society by selflessness, self-sacrifice and the provision of hope which is essential for us all.

## A Roadmap for living

Amina Elshafei, a nursing student of Egyptian and Korean parents spoke of being the only Muslim family in their cul-de-sac of 84 houses: "Most of our neighbours are Christians. We love our neighbours – they always seem to have a minute to talk and see how the family is doing. Islam and Christianity acknowledge the importance of good neighbourly relations. Faith and the books of God provide me with the perfect roadmap. Islam, the way of peace, does not leave me guessing about any of life's important issues."

## Clash of civilisations can be avoided

Sr. Giovanni Farquers is Executive Director of the Ecumenical and Interfaith Commission of the Catholic Archdiocese in Sydney. Having studied Islam extensively, she believes that Judaism, Christianity and Islam have far more in common than everything which separates them – they are religions of faith believing in God, they are religions with a historical stamp, and all three have set down their message in holy scripture. She quoted the eminent theologian Dr. Hans Küng: "A clash of civilisations and of religions can be avoided and will be avoided if sufficient people devote themselves to it, for there will be no survival of humankind without peace among the nations, but there will be no peace among the nations without dialogue between the religions."

Keysar Trad is an Australian of Lebanese Muslim background and founder of the Islamic Friendship Association of Australia. A tireless worker for his community, he is the most interviewed Sydney Muslim since the events of 9/11. He is one of the 'motors' behind these dialogues. He spoke of the Prophet Muhammad as a man who walked in the footsteps of Christ, Moses and Abraham. "All the men of God are brothers," he said. "Their mothers are different, but they are the children of the same faith."

## History will record what we say here tonight

Special guest, Sheikh Khalid Yasin, an Afro-American who is a well-known charismatic speaker in the Muslim world, said: "Tonight we have a great



From left to right: Amina Elshafei, Linda Burney MP, Keysar Trad, Sheikh Yasin, Prof James Haire

opportunity and a great challenge. History will record what we say here tonight. We have the opportunity to be pioneers of a different thinking and architects of a new mentality where the treasures of our faiths can be shared and used to promote God-consciousness."

The Federal Attorney-General Philip Ruddock reminded the gathering that we do not have an established church in Australia. He said: "We need to move beyond tolerance to love and respect and learn from each other." The local Federal Member Tony Burke spoke passionately of the importance of the evening: "We don't need to have a go at each other to protect the integrity of our own faith. Tolerance isn't good enough – it is about being in community in every sense of the word."

## Televised follow up debate

The following week on Channel 9's show *Mornings with Kerri Ann*, Keysar Trad and James Haire joined journalist George Negus and an invited studio audience to discuss whether Christians and Muslims are compatible. Negus reminded people that Muslims comprise a quarter of the world's population and 99.9% are not terrorists. "The best thing we can do," he said, "is to work with the ones who are not." A student in the audience from a Christian high school on Sydney's North Shore spoke of his school establishing a relationship with a small Muslim school in Lakemba. "It was a bit awkward to begin with," he said, "but as we get to know each other, we find how much we have in common. We are all Australians." Building on this thought, James Haire concluded the debate with the words: "If we can't get it right in this country, I doubt we will get it right anywhere in the world."

Jane Mills

# Partnership with Indonesia

From 9-17 May 2005, Barbara Lawler, administration manager with the ABC in Sydney, visited Jakarta. She writes:

If you need some inspiration – a recharging of your spiritual batteries – let me recommend a week in Jakarta. Indonesia is not the first place we think of in Australia for refreshment, with 212 million people, 85% Muslim, and one of our nearest northern neighbours. We have some difficult history to grapple with, and some current disputes – not unusual for close neighbours. Yet Australia has a unique opportunity at this point in history to continue to develop a constructive partnership with Indonesia.

I went to assist in developing and consolidating the Indonesian delegation to the Brisbane Conference 1-5 July 2005, *Together ... Making a Difference* and also to give support to the Indonesian team who have some very big objectives such as answering corruption, reconciling across the different cultural and religious groups and including a significant outreach to the young generation.

My program was largely worked out by some of the young people whom I'd met previously and who have undertaken IofC courses in Australia eg Dadan Nugraha, Shinta Permata, Emma Soekarba, Pinky Hidayati and Maria

Ulfa, who recently attended the Creators of Peace Conference in Uganda.

My first date on Tuesday, with Pinky and Emma, was with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of Nahdlatul Ulama (PBNU), the largest Muslim organisation in Indonesia, and therefore the largest in the world. We had a valuable meeting of minds and hearts with these men who are currently dealing with the situation on the Thailand where there has been violence against the Muslim minority.

## Muslim-Christian dialogue

We talked about the importance of personal change and the 2003 Collaroy Conference contribution of the Lebanese who are "breaking the chain of hate" in their country. We also discussed the changes that were needed in the Australian community regarding ignorance of the Muslim faith which the initiatives of Muslim-Christian dialogues are addressing.

There was a very special time with Gusdur (ex-President Wahid), who is developing proposals for dealing with corruption in Indonesia and whom the IofC team are hoping will speak at their

Youth Camp in July. We went on to meet Habib Chirzin, Human Rights Commissioner, who is coming to the Brisbane Conference.

I had a one-day program at the University of Indonesia, invited by Emma, where Maria joined me initially to present her African experience. Two students have expressed interest in attending the Conference.

It was good to catch a glimpse of Bahrul Ilmi, who attended the 2003 Collaroy Conference. He is a journalist with the *Republika* newspaper and spends 4 hours a day travelling by motor bike to and from his office. He has taken a stand on bribery in his job.

Through Shinta and Dadan, I met people who are recognised for their writing on democracy and Islam in Indonesia and want to see more IofC stories on reconciliation and forgiveness; also the Director of one of the Christian Universities in Jakarta, who will work with our group towards the Asia Pacific Youth Conference in Indonesia next year.

It is refreshing to be in a country where you need to be very clear-cut about the basis of our work: four absolute moral standards and the guidance of God. Everywhere people were intrigued by the stories of healing and reconciliation between people, and the journey of the Clean Election Campaigns.

## Healing the past – hope for the future

A young Sudanese currently living at Armagh had an idea, after participating in the last *Life Matters* course, to work for the reconciliation of North and South Sudanese young people in Melbourne, based on his personal decision to forgive the past and help build a better future for his people. At the most recent meeting, people were encouraged to share their stories and all who spoke – Northerners and Southerners – expressed the pain of what they had been through. A North Sudanese youth worker also asked forgiveness in a very heartfelt way for the suffering her people had inflicted on the Southerners. This deeply touched a young Southerner who, until then, had not really wanted to get too involved in the proceedings. He joined the committee which was formed to continue to develop a relationship between them based on understanding, respect and trust. The next meeting will take place in June.

Rob Wood

### Book talk

## Why terror? Is there an alternative?

*Nineteen Muslims speak their views with a forward by Imam Dr. Abduljalil Sajid, Chairman of the Muslim Council for Religious and Racial Harmony, UK*

The following is an excerpt from a letter passed on to me by one of our special and avid book sellers in Sydney. It shows how one committed to a faith tradition can enhance another – thus we can build bridges of understanding across all faiths:

"Thank you so very much for sending me the book *Why Terror?* The stories are excellent – really creating a healing healthy bridge to Christ and a positive view of what Islam really means. Our son is a pastor at a Baptist church. I will pass this book on to him. I have fixed a blank page to the back titled *Bridgebuilders for Christ* for each person to sign and pass on."

This 40-page booklet is available from Joyce Fraser (02 9559 2301) at a special price for the month of June of \$5 post-free.

Joyce Fraser