

## ***Flying in the face of our exclusion zones***

As horrifying details of the recent communal violence in Gujarat, India, continue to come to light, Harsh Mander writes in *The Times of India*, "The unending tragedy holds up a mirror to us as human beings, and to our society and polity. What can transform ordinary people law abiding, industrious, God-fearing into merciless, murderous mobs? Can you or I be similarly transformed one day?"

"Our agony deepens when we encounter the defiant absence of remorse in mainstream Gujarati society," he continues. "A chilling word that you encounter frequently in Ahmedabad these days is border. People have drawn borders between sections of the city in which one or the other community is amassed, and are fearful to cross these borders... Which wells of poison have seeped into our souls to enable us to erect such tall and uncompromising walls of hatred between our people?"

As the kilometres of wall goes up between Palestinian and Israeli territories in the West Bank, here in Australia we talk of exclusion zones to protect our comfort zones against incursions by unknown others from far away. Our recent census results point to increasing numbers choosing to live alone. In many cases they are individuals wanting the protection of comfort zones from known others near at hand. So, as social commentator Hugh Mackay pointed out, the 'cafe culture' thrives instead, as people seek other ways of experiencing community. Even among many God-fearing, selfless people doing good, it is often easier to live *for* others than to live *with* others. Xenophobia, fear of the "other", is

one of the most primeval fears mankind experiences. We forget that the Divine, that God is also "Other". The traditional Hindu greeting "namaste" is a recognition of God in the other. In the shrinking heart of Australia, fear reigns. In the confused heart of America, fear reigns. In the tormented heart of the Middle East, fear reigns.

### ***Our threatened humanity***

But, says Harsh Mander, "there is still much from which to draw hope." He spells out the heroic actions of neighbours in Gujarat from different communities seeking to save the other; media outrage and outspokenness; youth peace volunteers and so on. He concludes, "It is from these scattered precious pieces that we collectively need to rebuild our threatened humanity." And doubtless such stories exist in their thousands around the world.

Flying in the face of exclusion zones, small groups and families

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around the world recognised 1 June as "Open homes, listening hearts day". This was an idea mooted and adopted at the *MRA Initiatives Of Change* gathering, the Global Hoho, last January. While it may have been a small start this year, news from several countries has come of people reaching out to others from a different community and inviting them into their homes to share meals and

friendship. In Perth, friends of MRA-IC have made such occasions into a regular event. In Adelaide 40 adults and children including refugees and new Australians from Afghanistan, Iraq, Peru and Bangladesh joined in a shared lunch in one home and then proceeded in a shared walk with koala-spotting to tea in another home. In Melbourne, a profoundly moving occasion was held for 74 women from 20 countries at Armagh, the Australia Pacific centre for MRA-IC. Welcomed by an Aboriginal woman, and with a Sri Lankan dance and a Gaelic song, they sat around small tables and shared their stories. All want to continue the process appreciating the power of the shared story telling.

### ***Crossing to the other side***

A few years ago an Indian colleague, Sushobha Barve, described her work with victims of communal violence in Mumbai. It was in the largest slum in Asia. Tensions were rising. A narrow road separated the houses of one community from the other. As Sushobha met with the elders in one community a woman came up with an idea for defusing the tension. But it would require her to meet and speak with the elders in the other community. They were all afraid. Sushobha offered to go with her. They crossed the road together, to the houses on the other side, and the tension was defused. In Biblical tradition "crossing over to the other side" always involved challenge and transformation.

Stories of people reaching across, stepping across, inviting across, heroically, painfully, to reconciliation and rebuilding, are carried frequently in this newsletter. Some walls are healthy, some boundaries are essential, but many are not. The Indian poet Tagore warned his people at the time of Indian Independence against "narrow domestic walls". A Muslim Sufi poet wrote, "When the walls of my house fell down I could see the stars." Each one of us can examine the health or otherwise of our personal walls and exclusion zones; and as we share our findings with others so a new understanding of community is made possible.

—Jean Brown, Adelaide

# From a night-time of mistrust

*In January last year several Australians participated in the Creators of Peace meeting at the MRA Centre in Panchgani, India (see February 2001 Newsbriefs). One of the organisers, Dr Christiane Garin from Switzerland, describes remarkable developments that have flowed from an encounter between African women at that conference.*

Divided by the mistrust and the hatred that recent war had sown between their two countries, a Congolese and a Rwandan woman came face to face a year ago in Panchgani. Both had experienced the personal cost of poverty and violence, of exile and of separation from their loved ones. Their first encounter was marked by an explosion of bitterness and anger. It led to night-long talks, where listening to each other and sharing their common suffering finally brought some understanding. And then forgiveness and the desire to work together towards a different future for all the peoples of the region.

## **Beyond political jargon**

Some months later, during the *Round Table for Reconciliation in the African Great Lakes* at Caux, this profound change of heart in the Congolese woman was a significant stepping-stone enabling a true and honest dialogue between Congolese, Burundian and Rwandan participants. At the beginning of the Round Table, our Congolese friend had to face another Rwandan, a man whom she would have "gladly helped to put to death" had she been among the crowd who beat him up when he was caught in Kinshasa a few years ago. Again, she struggled the whole night with herself and with God. The following morning, in front of her compatriots (some of whom couldn't accept it), she summoned enough courage to ask his forgiveness for her attitude. It moved

everyone at the Round Table and brought us to a deeper level of reality which rendered small talk, political jargon and excuses unacceptable. It set the tone for the discussions which followed.

Several Congolese leaders who were present at that Round Table requested that our friend take part in the "Inter-Congolese leaders and politicians dialogue" which has met in recent months, first in Addis Ababa and then in South Africa, in an attempt to form an interim constitution leading, hopefully, to a free, united and democratic Congo. Our friend was able to participate in both places as an observer, together with her husband and another colleague.

They talked face-to-face with most of the government and opposition faction leaders involved in these very difficult negotiations. They were able to share their experiences of listening to the other's views and their faith in the possibility of a change of heart, with people who are shaping the destiny of one of the largest and most pivotal countries in Africa – leaders desperately in search of peace and reconciliation after many years of dictatorship and chaos.

Much remains to be done as the negotiations are still hampered by opposition. But our friends have become trusted civil society advisers to many of their leaders. They are pursuing their tasks as peace-builders "one heart at a time".



**PERTH:** It was an easier journey than two young Aboriginal girls made years ago, walking for 90 days along the rabbit proof fence through some of WA's harshest country.

On Saturday 9 June, 46 of us from three Perth reconciliation groups travelled by bus to Mogumber Mission some 200 kms north-west of Perth. Initially it was the Moore River Government Native Settlement, featured in the film "Rabbit Proof Fence". The party was led by the Rev. Cedric Jacobs, a Nyoongar elder and one of the "stolen generation" who had spent eight years at the mission.

None of the early mission buildings remain. As we walked around the location Cedric pointed out the site of the Superintendent's residence, of the boys and girls dormitories. We were shown the route the girls who escaped took from their dormitory, down to the pump house and then over the river which they crossed using a wire fence. They made their way on foot to the rabbit proof fence and then home to Jigalong.

Later we visited the Aboriginal cemetery, the largest in Australia. A beautiful memorial wall contains the names of the 400 who died during their confinement at the Moore River Settlement. The graves lay among lovely Australian shrubs and trees, overlooking the surrounding hills. In this quiet bushland setting we observed a minute's silence after which Cedric said, "We can take our weaknesses and make them our strengths. We can take our negatives and make them our positives."

– Lindsay Cartwright, Perth

**CANBERRA:** "Poet, writer and former counter-espionage operative Michael Thwaites has been made Officer of the General division of the Order of Australia," reported *The Canberra Times*, featured in its Queen's Birthday Honours listings.

Thwaites, who served many years on the Council of Management for Moral Re-Armament, was recognised for his "services to the community, to the Anglican Diocese of Canberra-Goulburn, and to literature as an author of poetry and narrative works reflecting the emergence of Australia's nationhood."

Among his four published collections of poetry is his *The Anzac Graves at Gallipoli*, which is regularly read at Anzac Day services. During World War II Thwaites served in the Royal Navy.

With his late wife, Honor, he wrote the *Hymn for Australia Day*, sung at the Bicentennial celebrations in Sydney and at the opening of Parliament House.

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At this year's conferences in Caux, Switzerland, one session (12-18 July) will focus on "Connecting communities for reconciliation and justice". Johnny Huckle and John Bond have been asked to speak about the *Journey of Healing*. Johnny Huckle is an indigenous singer and songwriter well-known on the NSW music circuit. Last year he was part of the MRA group which visited South Africa and Zimbabwe, speaking and singing to 10,000 people. Though partially supporting himself with his music, Johnny contributes much of his time to the "Journey of Healing" and needs financial help to get to Caux.

Several whom the MRA group met in Zimbabwe also hope to come to Caux. They are courageously at work in their own country, and will have much to contribute. However, inflation is so rampant that an airfare is far out of reach. They are raising what money they can, but will need substantial help from outside the country. It will cost about \$2,500 for each person to get to Caux and stay there. Friends in Britain are raising funds to enable two Zimbabweans to go. Could we in Australia raise enough for a third?

*If you would like to help, either towards Johnny Huckle's or a Zimbabweans' fare to Caux, MRA in Melbourne would be happy to receive donations (see address on page 4).*

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# What happened at the MRA-IC national gathering ?

The annual MRA-IC National Gathering, held over the Queen's Birthday long weekend, brought together more than 40 people from around Australia and New Zealand.

Along with planning for the April 2003 international conference in Sydney, appraising finances, and developing team spirit, the gathering also looked at where Australia was heading in a session "A vision that inspires action". Tim Holding, MP for the multicultural electorate of Springvale in Melbourne, spoke movingly of his recent experience where the liberal democratic values he espouses seemed to clash with those of a major religious group in his electorate. This presents a challenge to the multicultural society he believes in and raises the question of how to go beyond the points of disagreement to build that society.

In that same session John Bond, secretary of the National Sorry Day Committee, told of the battle for real consultation with the "stolen generations" across Australia over the content of the Reconciliation Place monument being established in Canberra. Their request has been accepted by the Government and they are now engaged in a consultation process to ensure that this major monument will give the true picture of our past.

## Co-workers coming

Quynh-Tram Trinh flew in from Canberra bringing with her a "hot off the press" brochure for a new leadership course for young Australian adults (*see article to the right*).

The planning has been facilitated by an intercity, email-connected working group.

Over the next three months four co-workers – Ola Wedzony (Poland), Sharon Hopkins (Canada), Jung Ji-Sun (Korea) and Sukoluhle Mpofu (Zimbabwe) – will arrive to work with MRA-IC. They will base at Armagh in Melbourne and have invitations to assist in other parts of Australia too.

**Phil writes:** I felt it a privilege to be present at the National Gathering, which gave a good overview of the work being done

*First timers at an MRA/IC national gathering, Phil and Margaret Jefferys drove 16 hours each way from Manilla, NSW, to take part. Phil had worked full time with MRA in India and Europe for a period in the 1960s before taking up farming with his teacher wife Margaret, first on a property near Broken Hill and then in northern NSW. Currently Phil is registered with Centrelink as working voluntarily with MRA-IC and is helping to consolidate a farmer's network to respond to the "big picture" food needs of the world. He told of an invitation from a member of Cambodia's Constitutional Council, whom he had met recently in India, to visit Cambodia to help set-up a Farmer's Dialogue there. Phil and Margaret comment on the Melbourne gathering:*

by MRA-IC. I was able to catch up with many and new friendships were also begun. The gathering was a truly unifying experience and well-worth the travel. I look forward to working on the issues concerning farmers.

**Margaret adds:** I had visited Armagh briefly once but it has changed significantly over the 30 years. Rob and Cheryl Wood (the hosts) made us very welcome and we settled in as part of the family. It was a very busy weekend with plenty to occupy the mind and information to digest. I remained very much an observer, listening and taking in all that

was said.

The program was varied so it didn't feel like one long meeting. Each chairperson kept their meeting to the topic and mostly on time. Enough time was allocated for questions or comments so that no-one could say they didn't have the chance to be heard. Pause time was also allowed so that you could take in what had been said.

All involved with MRA-IC are a wonderfully friendly crew, eager to share thoughts and ideas. They are all working together for the one aim without discord or factions.

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## Needed: 25 young potential leaders

*Quynh-Tram Trinh, a civil servant in Commonwealth Treasury, is the initiator of a leadership course for 25 selected young adult Australians which aims to develop "unselfish and interactive leadership". Before moving to Canberra, Quynh-Tram completed her Masters in Public Policy & Management at Monash and for three years was research manager at the Melbourne Convention and Marketing Bureau. Though continuing her study at the ANU and working full-time, Quynh-Tram "keeps up her spirit" through her community work, serving on the ACT Ministerial Advisory Council on Women. She describes why, in addition to all that, she launched this course:*

Prior to joining Treasury, I spent 17 months in Asia, Europe and North America. That journey took me to Caux, Switzerland, where I joined a shortened *Foundations for Freedom* course. For several years this course has run successfully in Eastern Europe countries. Taken by its possibilities for Australians I asked Erik Andren, the initiator and presenter, if he would come and offer it here. I found him keen to work with young Australians who respond to a course which has intellectual rigour.

In the past I have attended a number of management and leadership courses, including the Queen's Trust leadership course for young adult Australians. I find, however, there's a lack of courses that deal with the development of ethics as the basis of leadership. This aspect is vital to the sustainability of leadership, and is best learnt by people in their early adulthood.

So in discussion with Erik, the course has been developed. And from 14-24 November he will present it for the first time in Australia to 25 selected participants, under the name *Humanity, Belief and Freedom*.

At the recent MRA-IC National Gathering

in Melbourne we launched the 10-day live-in course, directed towards an 18-35+ age group. As the Course brochure says: "Many of today's leadership programs for young adults look at the external socio-economic issues and problems, and discuss ways to manage them. However, we also need courses which deal with inner development and skills of living which are the basis of leadership. Humanity, Belief and Freedom aims to fill this need. It is a life-skills course for young adults."

The brochure outlines the aims of the course and the topics it covers:

- ◆ the basics of being human
- ◆ who am I
- ◆ how do things change
- ◆ the essence of humanity
- ◆ taking off with new skills

Broadhurst Lodge at Yarra Junction in outer Melbourne will be the Course venue.

*Costs, inclusive of accommodation and course fees, are \$700. Further information and brochures can be gained from contacting (03) 9822 1218, <hbf@mra.org.au>*



## 100 years since its doors were opened

On 7 July, 100 years ago, the Caux-Palace opened as the biggest and most luxurious hotel in Switzerland. Among the guests in its heyday were John D Rockefeller, the Maharajah of Baroda, Prince Ibn Saud (later to become King of Saudi Arabia), and stars of music, opera and the stage.

On 6 July this year, government representatives of Switzerland will take part in the centenary celebrations of the building, now called "Mountain House". A new audio-visual giving the history of the building, and its role as the international conference centre for MRA-IC, will premiere on the day.

But, more in keeping with its use during World War II, when the then bankrupt hotel was opened to escaping prisoners-of-war from Italy and Jewish refugees from Hungary, the feature of the anniversary will be a Caux lecture by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees on "Sharing responsibility for the protection of refugees in the world".

Conference themes are:

- Service, responsibility & leadership (5-10 July)
- Connecting communities for reconciliation and justice (12-18 July)
- Globalization – from conflict to opportunity (20-24 July)
- The road to renewal (27 July- August) 3
- Peace-building initiatives (4-10 August)
- The spiritual factor in secular society (10–12 August)
- Human security in a changing world (13 – 18 August)

*NEWSBRIEFS will not be published during August, but the September issue will give an overview of the conferences in Caux. Meanwhile, weekly letters from Caux giving the highlights of the sessions and media releases are available from the Melbourne address below; or on [www.caux.ch/](http://www.caux.ch/)*

## 'Action' in East Asia

*As Korea and Japan prepared for the World Cup, the East-Asian team of "Action for Life" (drawn from Lebanon, South Africa, Moldova, Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan and Korea) spent six weeks being hosted in the two countries. "Life is full of adventure and our hearts are full of gratitude," they write in their newsletter, telling of being spoiled by Korean food and culture. Below are some glimpses of their experiences...*

### **...in Korea, looking for way towards unification**

National unification is the most important subject for the Korean government and people. We had an opportunity to visit the Ministry of Unification and the Korean Institute of National Unification. Listening to their concerns and their ways for bringing two Koreas to one nation, we could feel their sorrow and loss at being separated as well as their eagerness and hope for reunification. For those of us coming from separated or conflicting communities, such aspirations were inspiring. Two MPs arranged for us to visit Panmunjom in the demilitarized zone between North and South Korea. The smell of war silenced our laughter.

One of the highlights of the second half of our stay in Korea was a meeting with Kim Tae-Zhee, former Ambassador to Germany and Japan. He gave us a brief but thorough history lesson on the relationship

### **... and in Japan: committed to healing**

One of our first meetings after arriving on 3 June was a one and a half hour dialogue with six members of Parliament. It was arranged by politician, Yukihisa Fujita. The MPs patiently listened to each one of us. Then we discussed such issues as cooperation among neighbouring countries, reconciliation between different communities, depression in young people and family life.

Former Prime Minister Tsutomu Hata spoke at the opening of the 25th Odawara International MRA-IC Conference on the theme, "21st Century for dialogue and reconciliation – everybody an initiator of change".

It attracted 150 participants from 20 countries. Many conversations revolved around the topic of Japanese-Korean relations.

Among the Korean participants was Reverend Mother Park Chung-Soo, a leader of Won Buddhism. She told

between Korea and Japan, explaining why many Koreans feel a certain mistrust and animosity toward the Japanese and focusing on rebuilding the relationships between the two countries.

A youth group called Neonaul (meaning "You, I and we") impressed us a lot – fourteen of them, most of whom have been to overseas MRA-IC training programs. They meet once a month to share their lives with each other and donate money to help their juniors go abroad for MRA-IC programs. We had the chance to sit down to share our life experience with each other.

About 50 students came from different universities for our final seminar. Some had attended the three-day camp which we led two weeks before.

movingly of giving up her bitterness towards Japan. In response a dozen Japanese came forward and knelt before her, asking forgiveness for what the Japanese had done to Koreans. Mother Park could not stop her tears, but helped each of them to stand up, and said, "I have been dealing with the reconciliation of our countries on the personal level passively, but from today I commit myself to deal with it more actively on the national and international level."

Late into the evening 30 Korean and Japanese young people and others at the conference discussed Mother Park's response for three hours. A Korean, Cheol Min, wrote of this discussion: "The younger generation (of Japan) are still not aware of the facts of our painful history. We cannot forget what we know, but we can forgive because they (the Japanese) are our friends. That is how Koreans can overcome the feelings of humiliation."