

Waging peace... in different situations

So much has been said, written, telecast of war and of the need for peace. This issue of NEWSBRIEFS simply surveys some ongoing "initiatives of change" which contribute to building peace in different situations.

We start with the dramatic meeting of two people, scarred by a long and bitter racial conflict. Taken from the SOUTH AFRICAN MRA NEWSLETTER, this story will be told by those involved in person at the upcoming conference in Sydney, "Together we can make a world of difference" (see box below for recent developments and details).

SOUTH AFRICA:

Warriors for healing

In November last year Letlapa Mphahlele, a former commander of the Azanian People's Liberation Army (the military wing of the Pan African Congress during the apartheid struggle), spoke at the Press Club in Cape Town. Along with others he had orchestrated the bombing in 1993 of the Heidelberg Tavern and an attack during a service at St James church, both in Cape Town.

In December, Letlapa was given a home-coming ceremony at his rural village, Ga-Mphahlele, in Limpopo Province. Charl van Wyk, a pastor and survivor of the attack on the St James Church, and Ginn Fourie, lecturer from the University of Cape Town, whose only daughter was killed in the Heidelberg Tavern bomb blast, were invited by Letlapa to speak.

Pain was unbearable

As Ginn Fourie came to the microphone she asked Letlapa to translate for her so that "all the mothers and fathers can understand what I say... (When) my daughter died the pain was unbearable. At that time I could have killed you with my bare hands... That's nine years ago. The journey is long."

She said that she had met Letlapa about one month before – first through an interview on the radio. "I could hear that you were a man of great integrity," she said to him. "So I went to hear what you had to say at the launch of your book, *Child of this Soil*. As I read your book I realized that the man of stone has been weathered by the awful experiences you've had, and you have become a child of the soil."

Bridge-building in Sydney



Over 200 people have registered for the conference in Sydney from 23-27 April – including 50 from 20 countries in Asia, Africa, North America, Europe and the Pacific. Seven New Zealanders are coming.

In addition to speakers listed in the March issue of NEWSBRIEFS, **Dr Maggie Hodgson** of the Canadian First Nations has just confirmed her participation. A significant figure in the healing of Canada's "stolen generations" – or "residential school survivors" as they are known – she has launched a national Day of Healing and Reconciliation to take place each year on 26 May (Sorry Day in Australia).

Many Australians will have stories to tell at the conference. In the opening plenary on "Communities working together for justice and peace", a group from **Greater Dandenong** in Victoria will speak about interfaith initiatives underway in their multicultural city.

From rural New South Wales, Beulah Adams – who appeared on the ABC's *Australian Story* – will tell of the memorial at **Myall Creek** created in memory of Wirrayaraay people murdered in June 1838. Beulah's ancestor was among the convicts who were armed for the unprovoked and premeditated massacre. (See also page 2).

Glen Stelzer, principal of a primary school in **Sydney's highly multi-cultural western suburbs**, will tell how pupils at his school became pen pals of a school on Sydney's northern beaches, and then met up for a day of bridge-building.

The Lebanese Community Council of NSW, umbrella body for 32 Lebanese groups in Sydney, is hosting a pre-conference reception for the **five coming from Lebanon** to speak about their peace-building.

Needs as big as hopes

We are grateful for \$12,580 which has been generously contributed towards the \$36,000 expenses in excess of expected income. Of the \$12,000 budgeted to assist people from Fiji, PNG, Tonga and The Solomons, \$4,000 has been given. A hoped-for outcome of the conference is to develop a **Pacific Peace Network**. Supporting the Lebanese group will need a similar amount. *Any further contributions can be sent to MRA-IC at the address on the bottom of page 4.*

She went on, "I forgave this man because of his humanity. There is work for us to do. You are very brave (to invite me here today) because you

had no idea what I'd say."
(At the Press Club occasion in

Continued on next page

South Africa

Continued from previous page

November MRA worker Vilma Maritz had met Letlapa Mphahlele and given him a copy of *Beyond Violence*, a book by Agnes Hofmeyr, whose father – a white farmer – was buried alive by the Mau Mau during Kenya's war of independence).

Symbol of life and hope

Letlapa asked to visit Agnes. She shared with him the story of her grief, and the healing and purpose that God has given her. Letlapa invited her to the Cape Flats to plant one of four trees in memory of those who died in the massacres, and as a symbol of reconciliation, life and hope.

Agnes and Vilma describe what happened: "We arrived at the school hall in the crowded township of Khayelitsha to be welcomed by a lot of young men who helped us to park and promised to care for our car. We were given front seats where we listened to speaker after speaker talking of reconciliation. Especially poignant were the words of Mrs Fourie and Letlapa Mphahlele.

"Letlapa began his speech with the words, 'I am sorry' and read a moving poem he had written for Ginn Fourie's late daughter, named Lindiwe by her Xhosa friends. Ginn said, 'Together we can become warriors for peace and reconciliation.'

"Agnes was asked to tell her story... and how she 'had had to recognise my own arrogance, superiority and selfishness before I could forgive and ask for forgiveness and learn to love, appreciate and understand the black races of Africa'.

The courage to go through

"The response from the audience was overwhelming. The atmosphere was of a family united – a people hungry for an answer. God was at work. The doors are open. All we need is the courage to leave our comfort zones and go through."

Later one of the participants phoned to tell Vilma and Sam Pono that there would be more such occasions. He said: "I was in the struggle, but today I see that the white person is essential to liberation in this country. I want to work for forgiveness and reconciliation so that we can be liberated."

Sierra Leone

Losing the lust for revenge

In the midst of civil war a new organisation *Hope Sierra Leone (HSL)* was born out of the experience of one man losing the lust for revenge and finding hope for his life.

One of HSL's most recent actions was to hold a peace and reconciliation seminar in Makeni, the former stronghold of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). It ended with the planting of the "Moral Re-Armament Peace Tree" by members of the RUF, the Sierra Leone Military Brigade, the Regional Police HQ and the Paramount Chief with his Council of Elders.

A similar seminar was held in the town of Bo, bringing together members of the RUF and the Civil Defence Force (CDF) for the first time. Among the participants were a senior UN military delegation, National Security Chief Samuel Hinga Norman and the Regent Chief. HSL has also held community workshops on moral values and

non-violent communication. After taking part in one, Alimamy Kargbo, a fisherman from Tissanana, said: "I used to fight a lot with my wife. I am now treating her with respect and love."

HSL is also working with the RUF on a new 100-acre farming project in Makeni, and in the South with the CDF on a 150-acre rice project. Rice is now being harvested on a pilot project covering 40 acres and involving about 50 families in two communities, one of them thoroughly ravaged during the war. Local farmer Salieu Kamara said: "After the war, I thought it was the end of my life, my family and my very existence. But, thank God, through HSL Empowerment Program, I now own a rice field. I can now support myself and my family."

The President of Sierra Leone has pledged his support for HSL, and national television carries two documentaries each month about it.

New South Wales:

Letting go of damaging hurts

Sukholuhle Mpfu from Zimbabwe, currently working with MRA-IC in Melbourne, writes about her recent trip with some colleagues to Myall Creek in NSW – site of a massacre of Aboriginal women and children in 1838. Descendants of both victims and perpetrators have come together in recent times to create a memorial on the site.

One of the reasons I came here to Australia is to work with different religions and cultures, so I was happy to have the opportunity to travel to Myall Creek. To see how beautiful and peaceful the land is, yet it carries a lot of blood – blood of the Wirrayaraay tribe, traditional owners of this land who deserved respect and understanding. God knows what happened there back in 1838. There were no eye witnesses except two boys about eight years old who escaped.

I met one of the descendants of the European perpetrators, a great opportunity to go through the history with her. The place seems now to

breathe a sense of peace because of the memorial and cleansing ceremonies that have happened there. The descendants of the Aboriginal tribe did not want to step on this land for many years but now they freely do so.

It came about because two women, non-indigenous Beulah Adams and

indigenous Sue Blacklock have decided to reconcile to heal the past and carry on. These two descendants have suffered scorn and hate from people who do not want to know the truth. An unusual bond is growing between those who have accepted apology and those who have apologised.

What I learnt from this trip was that we need to let go of negative, damaging hurts and feelings. Apology helps to restore relationships and forgiveness helps us to grow. This is

such a beautiful country and a beautiful world. What should we make of it? We have to first find peace within ourselves. If we

cannot forgive others we destroy the bridge over which we must pass ourselves. These challenges I now ask of myself in order to restore true friendship and love within my family and friends. I feel a strong sense of duty to do this in my country, Zimbabwe, too.

***'If we cannot forgive others
we destroy the bridge over
which we must pass
ourselves'***

Melbourne

Open home in Armagh

Mary Whiteside and Dorothy Hicks write about the third "Open Homes, Listening Hearts" occasion on March 2nd, at Armagh, the Australia-Pacific centre for MRA-IC in Melbourne. These occasions, designed to draw women from different ethnic and religious backgrounds together to understand one another more deeply, attract between 50-80 women each time.

In welcoming everyone to Aboriginal land, Yorta Yorta woman Walda Blow from Cummeragunga referred to the healing properties of gum leaves, and to women's potential for healing the hurts and divisions in their own lives, so enabling them to create peace in their communities.

Mary Griffith shared her story as a university student, as a mother, and the way in which simple family hospitality helped her husband, Allan,

build international bridges of trust.

A young Muslim woman talked of the effects of her choice to wear the scarf in the workplace and community and her reasons for choosing to leave behind her "power dressing" days. Her assessment of the afternoon was, "It is good, in challenging times, for women of different faiths to get together".

Maria Lancaster, a university student, had written an original song which touched many hearts.

... and from India, Sydney and around Australia:

Opening homes to those who are different

The idea for an "Open homes, listening hearts" campaign around the world was first mooted at the *MRA-Initiatives of Change* gathering, the "Global HoHo", in India, January 2002. The idea was to encourage people on one particular day to reach out to someone with whom they might not otherwise interact. So, as scheduled, on 1 June last year, people in several countries invited a person or a family from another culture into their home for a cup of tea or a meal. Reports on these efforts were carried in last July's

NEWSBRIEFS.

Again this year, around the world, MRA-IC teams in different countries are launching the observance in various ways. Here in Australia, a national "Open Homes, Open Hearts Day" will be launched from MRA-IC conference in Sydney at the end of April. It was decided to adapt the theme to "...Open Hearts" rather than "Listening Hearts", in the interests of publicity, and then to incorporate the need to listen to each other in the subtext. Before the launch, the idea will be workshopped by the participants at the conference.

Break down barriers

The launch will take place at the public meeting on Saturday, 26 April, chaired by the Chairman of the Community Relations Commission for NSW, Stepan Kerkyasharian. Another public figure in Sydney, eager to give his endorsement and to promote the

idea on his regular radio program, is Bill Crews of the Exodus Foundation.

As war and threats of terrorism reinforce our fear and alienation from one another within the Australian community, this initiative is being welcomed as a simple way to break down barriers and promote genuine appreciation and understanding. Further developments will be announced in *NEWSBRIEFS* and everyone is invited to be part of launching this movement across Australia.

Adelaide-Melbourne:

Women explore the nature of peace

Beginning in Adelaide, two more peace circles have started up in Melbourne with women drawn from the *Open Homes, Listening Hearts* occasion. Twenty women responded to an invitation from Pari Sanyü to meet in two circles once a week for six weeks.

These circles of between 8-12 women per circle, follow the same format. There are two main components. The first is to create a space where women from different faith and cultural backgrounds can share their stories in an atmosphere of trust and respect. The second is to work through an exercise together called "Around the kitchen table - women discovering their peace creating potential". The exercise explores the nature of peace; its destruction and creation in heart, home and

Lane Cove

Light up the world

The most recent in a series of MRA-IC seminars on personal and social transformation was held in Sydney in early March. This time it was built around the visit to Sydney by Adelaide author Mike Brown and his book *No Longer Down Under*.

Chaired energetically by Chichi and Joseph Githaiga from Kenya, the roomful of people at Lane Cove Civic Centre was charged with energy they led everyone singing, "With the love of God we can change the world".

Mike shared stories of "Australians creating change" from his book and two young women, one from Zimbabwe and one from Canberra, shared their dreams of how their lives might be used to make a difference in the world. Miriam Bond, a Canberra graduate in dance, said that she used her creative dance to convey ideas. "Everyone can do something to light up people's world," she said.

Responding, groups discussed around tables where they find hope and how they see themselves making a difference to the world. An 82 year-old lady was so excited to see the determination of the young to make a better world that she couldn't stop talking to friends about it back at her retirement village.

- Joyce Fraser, Sydney

community; the personal challenges and cost of peace-creating; the role of personal transformation and inner listening; the particular needs of the communities of which the women are a part and the search for peace-creating initiatives to be taken together.

In Adelaide, where the circle includes women from Iraqi, Indian, Russian, Bougainvillean and European backgrounds, considerable interest is being expressed by others who are eager to join future circles. It is envisaged that participants from existing circles will be the coordinators of new ones and so on.

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Caux, Switzerland:

From conflict to community in the global home

"The wish that a new century would usher in a world transformed as if by magic lies in ruins," says the opening paragraph of the printed invitation to the 2003 Caux conferences in Switzerland. "There is an urgent need for integrity in human relationships; in economic life, in public governance... an urgent need for a dialogue across cultures, religions and economic divides... and an equal need for an inner journey of the human spirit, towards eternal spiritual values."

Brochures and details of the sessions listed below are available from the address on this page. Or from regional centres. Also on the Caux web site: www.caux.ch

2 – 9 July, 2003

Partnerships in service, responsibility and leadership

How leadership, motivated by personal responsibility and a spirit of service, can transform society... across generations, cultures, professions.

11 – 15 July, 2003

Globalisation... as if people really mattered

An honest conversation on integrity, responsibility and accountability.

What role must business, labor, media, government, religion, academia and activists plan in order to ensure a just globalisation?

17 – 24 July, 2003

From conflict to community at home

A meeting of all generations to explore how the home can be a source of joy and creativity, and contribute to making civil society work.

26 – 30 July, 2003

The spiritual factor in secular society: partners in peace-making

After centuries often marked by conflict, rivalry, mistrust and ignorance, the world's religions are working together as partners for peace.

2 – 8 August, 2003

Peace-building initiatives

Courageous people in conflicts, working in the belief that there are better ways than violence to achieve justice and shift entrenched attitudes.

12 – 17 August, 2003

Conflict prevention through human security

Human security largely depends on good governance, which includes beginning with the individual. A focus on how to apply these values.

How 'Agenda for Reconciliation' works

During the 1990s, war and genocide were the main news from the Great Lakes region of Africa. Conflicts within the Democratic Republic of Congo escalated into a civil war and then an international war in 1998. The hope of peace is fragile, despite agreements signed between the Democratic Republic of Congo and its neighbours, Rwanda and Uganda. The situation of the people of Burundi is still of great concern.

Agenda for Reconciliation, one of the named programs of *MRA-Initiatives of Change* based in Caux, has convened a number of "Round Table" dialogues among people from Great Lakes nations in an attempt to take this part of Africa a step closer to reconciliation and peace. These are ongoing in their support for the people involved. A participant in one such recent dialogue concluded, "What governments of nations have failed to do, this small group of people were able to do. The heart of the message of *MRA-Initiatives of Change* was vividly present all through these days."

In recent years *Agenda for Reconciliation* has undertaken similar initiatives with people at the heart of many conflict situations: the Balkan states, Angola, the Horn of Africa, Bougainville, the Middle East, Cambodia, to name a few.

Details can be found from its web site: www.caux.ch/afri/

Web-surfers:

A new interactive international website for *MRA-Initiatives of Change* is under development. In fact you can log onto the prototype at:
<http://proto.iofc.org>
Under Username type: iconline
and Password type: prototype
Then please take 5-10 minutes to do the survey



Anyone with a love of books should really consider this...

Here's a great opportunity – to take on management of Grosvenor Books in Australia.

Tom and Elisabeth Ramsay are now relinquishing this voluntary role which they have filled for the last 12 years and need to hand it over to another person or couple.

An extended hand-over period is available.

The new manager should be located within easy reach of one of our national centres but not necessarily in Melbourne.

Although the time required can vary, it is estimated that the essential work involves an average of about six hours a week, which can be done on a flexitime basis.

Details of what is involved are available from Tom or Elisabeth (03 9889 1769) or any MRA-IC state centres.

If you would like to know more, please ask!

All contributions of items, news, comments welcome. Next deadline: Friday 21 May 2003
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