

Journey down under

Hisham Shihab, a Muslim journalist from Beirut who came with the Lebanese delegation to the conference "Together we can make a world of difference", tells the story of his visit to Australia:

Muhieddine, my distant cousin, and I were apprehensive of the trip to Australia. We wondered a lot about the use of going to the furthest place on earth - "down and under". What could we change in one "orphaned" visit, as they say in Arabic!! In addition, there was the inconvenience of travelling from Beirut to Sydney and back, spending more than 48 hours in planes and airports, with SARS "in the air". And Australia, as many relatives told me, is not an easy place. A cousin of mine emigrated in the 1960s, quarrelled with "log-headed" Aussies and came back home. These considerations discouraged Muhieddine and me and partly influenced our decision at one point to cancel the trip. But a few days before the trip was due, I decided to go. I felt that God wanted me to go against all odds. I would miss one week of teaching, leave my wife Mona alone to tackle our little baby and three teenagers, swallow my decision not to go which I had circulated by e-mail all over the world, cross Muhieddine and "betray" him.

We arrived in Sydney in the early morning - four tired Lebanese. But after some rest, a walk, and a dip in a swimming pool, I was ready for action. That same afternoon we visited a Lebanese community centre. It felt like home with all its historical baggage.

Nothing breaks stereotypes like facing them head on. Aussie proved not only to be worth visiting, but a "wonderland". Also Aussies proved to be friendly and forthcoming. I can say that they combine the merits of both the Americans and the Europeans.

I believe that three experiences I had in Australia were set up by God.

The first was a visit to St Charbel's Maronite Catholic Church in Sydney. I was told that I would be the first Muslim to speak in that church. It was the first time that I had attended a Maronite mass, with the paintings of Mary and Charbel on the walls and the PowerPoint projection that accompa-

nied the service. I prayed to Allah to give me Wisdom and Strength to face and convince 400 "unfriendly" young people. And He did. My voice came out like thunder, delivering a straightforward message: "To be good Christians, you have to be good followers of Jesus. You should be good Samaritans. We, the Lebanese Muslims, did not see this in you. You turned the cross, a symbol of redemption and love, into a symbol of vengeance, hatred, and murder." They were not easy words, but they were told in love and humility. And they were accepted.

We were both astounded

The second was in Melbourne. The Lebanese were invited to a dinner in a suburb. Everything went as usual, till the owner of the restaurant, a Lebanese Australian, spoke out. He had been a prisoner under Assaad Shaftari [another of the Lebanese delegation - Ed]. Assaad was a leader in a rightist Christian militia during the 15-year Lebanese civil war, while the restaurant owner was a leader in a leftist militia. He had been detained at a

check point and released, after some time, by Assaad. As soon as he mentioned where he was based in Beirut, it dawned on me that he was one of those responsible for the killing of my brother in the early 1980s. I revealed to him my identity, and it seemed that he could not take it. He was flabbergasted. In fact, we were both astounded. The three of us shook hands and posed for the camera. I could not then stand it any more. All the sweet memories of my eldest brother, who was like a father, but above all was my intimate friend, came back. I went to the toilet and wept. My brother was only 18 months older than me, and was 23 when he was shot by this man's militia. It took me 22 years to meet the man - and forgive him. But it was in Australia, over there, "down and under", 22 years in the making, by the Hand of the Almighty.

The third experience proved that we are really living in a small world. It was Anzac Day. An Australian friend was driving me to see the famous Opera House, and I saw the yellow flags strewn on lawns. Asking my friend what all that fuss was about, he explained: the First World War and Gallipoli. Well, I have great uncles who died in Gallipoli, fighting on the side of the Turks. They were the brothers of my grandfather and of Muhieddine's grandmother who lived to the age of 101 and kept mentioning her brother who died fighting in Gallipoli. At that moment, I wished Muhieddine was there, and realised the significance of what the MRA is doing all over the world - fulfilling the brotherhood of Man, from Beirut to Sydney - over there, but no more "down and under".

Africa and the Pacific

In May Kenyan lawyer Joseph Karanja visited Papua New Guinea with Alan Weeks, after taking part in the Asia/Pacific regional conference in Sydney and the International IC Council meeting in Melbourne. Joseph writes in the Kenyan MRA News Bulletin:

I left Australia feeling that every individual matters, and that he/she can make a difference.

During a week in Papua New Guinea, I talked about the experience of Kenya in the Clean Elections Campaign, Clean Kenya Campaign, and now Clean Africa Campaign. In Port Moresby I met the Prime Minister, Sir Michael Somare; Honourable Sam Akoitai, Minister for Mining; and the

Catholic Archbishop. The Media Council, a body that coordinates all the NGOs in PNG, organised meetings with the press and Transparency International. I was interviewed for three hours by a leading FM station. The show was hosted by Mr Roger Hau'ofa, said to be the most popular presenter in PNG. In Alotau, I had the privilege of promoting the Clean PNG Campaign, which was inspired by the Kenyan experience. The local MRA-IC team led by Russell Aneluwo and others organised a series of meetings.

My prayer now is for Africa to work hand in hand with Pacific nations. There is a need to exchange ideas and personnel because we share common problems.

Caux - July highlights

For 57 years *Moral Re-Armament*, now *Initiatives of Change (IC)*, has held world conferences during the European summer in the spectacular mountain resort of Caux sur Montreux, in Switzerland. This year's series, running 2 July - 17 August, has the theme "From conflict to community in the global home". Some highlights of the first three conferences follow, drawn from the Caux centre's website (www.caux.ch) and Andrew Stallybrass's weekly letters:

The opening conference, *Partnerships in Service, Responsibility and Leadership* (2-9 July), was organised mainly by young professionals from the countries of Eastern and Central Europe. It included exchanges between NGOs promoting democratic values and social cohesion in East and West, and ran concurrently with a Young Politicians Forum. Thirty students from Monterrey, Mexico, joined the conference while on a European study tour, and a Swiss NGO, Youth Exchanges for Peace, brought a visiting group of 30 from Afghanistan, Iraq, Bosnia, Croatia, Serbia and USA.

At the same time the Caux Round Table (CRT) for international top management held a three-day meeting to consider its contribution to "globalization with a human face", inviting thinkers from the Jewish and Islamic faiths to join a Catholic Cardinal in presenting their traditions' approaches to "the moral imperatives of social justice". After their final dinner some CRT members joined in the Moldovan and Scottish dancing outside on the terrace, as did the senior Rabbi who was one of their guest speakers, but the Catholic cardinal had already left!

A new multimedia *Introduction to Initiatives of Change* is in use for incoming groups and at the start of conferences. This fully-scripted presentation of the history and core ideas of the Caux centre and IC is the product of intense international teamwork over many months.

"Official Day", the first Saturday of the Caux season (5 July), brought 100 guests - ambassadors and diplomats from Geneva and dignitaries from Bern, the Swiss capital - to join the 270 conference delegates. The spokesman of the Geneva Mosque and a representative of the Vaud Protestant Church Synod were present. Guests were welcomed by the Mayor of Montreux who is also a Swiss Federal MP, and by the President of the Caux Foundation.

Juan Somavia, the Chilean Director General of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Geneva, gave the first Caux Lecture of 2003. He suggested that while TV screens update

us on the latest share prices there are other figures to note constantly: "the more than one billion unemployed, under-employed or working poor; the half of humanity struggling to survive on less than \$2 a day". Rich "North" and poor "South" shared a growing sense of insecurity, he said. Many people "say yes to a market economy, but no to a market society ... I am convinced that the spiritual values of different traditions and cultures have given us a sound basis on which to build better societies: the dignity of the human being, the sanctity of our earth, the need for social justice, the sense of caring and solidarity ... Values don't need to be reinvented. They need to be applied!"

The 30th Caux Conference for Business and Industry (CCBI) (11-15 July) aroused widespread interest with its theme: *Globalization ... as if people really mattered*. This year also marks the 30th anniversary of E F Schumacher's seminal work *Small is Beautiful: economics as if people mattered*. A public dialogue between José Maria Figueres, a former President of Costa Rica and Managing Director of the World Economic Forum, and Ignacio Ramonet of the World Social Forum was moderated by former Canadian ambassador Kimon Valaskakis. Valaskakis himself belongs to the "Club of Athens" which promotes global good governance. Later that day Roderick Abbott, Deputy Director General of the World Trade Organisation, delivered the second 2003 Caux Lecture on the theme: "The global trading system: free, fair or foul?" His conclusion: "We are challenged to achieve a fairer spread of benefits from trade liberalisation."

The CCBI also heard from the Vice-President for Europe at the World Bank, the Director of the Institute of Business Ethics, UK, and the Director of Ethics and Business Conduct at Boeing's commercial aircraft division in Seattle. She had discovered Caux last year through the Internet. There were seminars on business and the AIDS pandemic, and on corruption, with the

participation of Transparency International. Brian Lightowler's new book *Corruption: Who Cares?* was on sale.

The local paper produced two major articles on the CCBI, with billboards on newsstands announcing "Globalization at the heart of the Caux conferences".

At a two-day *Hope in the Cities* workshop community activists, police, people from local government, the media, and business held an honest dialogue on "creating sustainable communities". A Colombian woman who had bad experience with police entered into dialogue with the police officers present. She later said, "I did not think that I could do anything, until I came here. I go away feeling that I can make a difference." A police officer said, "This has changed my life."

From conflict to community at home (17-24 July), the third conference, was planned by a mostly Norwegian team and billed as "a meeting of all generations". It brought a less formal atmosphere with many children taking part.

A Russian professor, Sergei Podbolotov, came specially from St Petersburg for this family conference and led a seminar on "Quiet time and the traditions of Russian spirituality". An Australian participant said he would use what he had learned for his own quiet times. Other seminars included "Getting older, getting wiser" and "Conflicts are an inevitable part of life; how do we deal with them?"

Dr Astrid Heiberg, a professor of psychiatry at the University of Oslo and a former Cabinet Minister in Norway, gave the third Caux Lecture on her experience of mediating in Sri Lanka. She advocated a greater inclusion of women in peace-building and discerned five qualities of "real women" that tended to come in women-only groups: non-competition; promoting of others; sharing; reading of non-verbal signals; and availability. "We must use the whole spectrum of humanity in conflict resolution," she concluded. Cornelio Sommaruga, the President of the Caux Foundation, in thanking said he hoped to join this exclusive club of real women, because "Men should be able to live these qualities too."

The 2003 *Caux Scholars Program* on conflict transformation is under way (12 July - 12 August) with 21 scholars from 15 countries. Kirgizstan and Burma are represented for the first time by an Uzbek student and a Karen refugee.



'The person I will change first...'

Participants in the just-concluded 12th Life Matters course (4 -13 July) write some of their impressions and conclusions:

Rob Lancaster, Arts/Law student, Canberra: With 17 participants from 13 countries we were certainly a group diverse in our backgrounds and experiences, but brought together through a common searching for direction, purpose, and growth. The course provided the framework to explore exactly what we mean by values, standards and morals and where they find a real place in our day to day lives. Quiet reflection, honest sharing, community building, discussion on conflict, relationships, change, identity, and then more recreational forays into dance, music, original composition, late night card games and sport; there was never a dull moment. Yet a mere description of the subject matter does little to convey the incredible spirit which developed in such great depth over the nine days we were together - a solid foundation which we will all be looking to develop in the years to come.

Niveditha Gounder, administrative and sales officer, Fiji: For our personal development we focused on the values of honesty, purity, selflessness and love. This gave us all, ranging from 18 to 44 years of age, the chance to explore our goals, hopes, careers, and our choices regarding friendships, relationships and marriage.

We have learnt about the importance of reconciliation and forgiveness, between people, cultures and countries. Helping serve a meal for homeless people and a meeting with Aboriginal people have been parts of this learning process.

From a poem by Niveditha:

A pledge for the world and me

The person I will change first ...

Is the one I see in the mirror

I have learnt the importance of values

Honesty, Purity, Selflessness and Love

Complete acceptance of myself has

been a part of this love

I have realised the power of a team

One with people from different

corners of the world

People with different goals and aspirations

Coming together, working side by side...

Christopher James, student of Creative Arts, Wollongong University: During the course I became aware who I am as an individual and what I

can give others. I learned that the purpose of purity is much more than just obeying God's word. It sets an example to others. As well as being totally in line you are confident with what you believe. The world becomes less confusing. It was a week of self-realisation.

How can I influence the world towards a positive change? It all begins with the self - what can you immediately say in every situation to be more positive, open and honest, towards each other, your community, your country and your world? You are responsible for your life through the choices you make and the chances you take.

Abdi H Mohamed, student, Somalia/NZ: This has been the most beneficial course that I have ever had the privilege to attend. I learned a lot of techniques and skills which already made me a lot better person than I was prior to the course. And the learning was fun! That is a great combination.

Dadan Muhammad Nugraha, student teacher, Jakarta, Indonesia: As a Muslim, I believe that if we truly believe in God, He will guide us to the right path through our inner voice. This course gave me more understanding about the real meaning of my life. With the power of God I promised myself that I must

change myself before I change others. I was sometimes seeing and judging others by their appearance. That made one of my eyes blind. A friend of mine in West Java has an intellectual weakness; he sometimes came to my place and talked to me, but I always ignored him. This course made me realise that my attitude to him was a very great mistake. When I meet him in Indonesia I'll ask his forgiveness. The course participants came from different countries, religions, traditions and backgrounds, but in nine days I feel that all of them are my own family.

Sam Kwok, Hong-Kong, Melbourne University student: I cherish the friendship among all participants in the course. Although we have different backgrounds I realise that our hearts are all the same. We can develop a lifetime partnership.

Henry Chu, Hong-Kong, Melbourne University student: After I

converted to Christ, I found the meaning of life - to love Him and to serve others. *Life Matters* course is a good tool for us to know more about ourselves and the world. Through others' life stories, I found that I am lucky to have food, shelter and the chance to be educated. I learnt to be grateful for what I have. Through the "journaling" time, I have strengthened my belief in God and become more clear about the goal to serve China under his plan.

Vichheka Khuon, languages student, Cambodia: *Life Matters* is the most important course that I ever attended. I thought that it was going to be too long, but the time ran so quickly that I felt that it was too short. The most important thing I learned is "quiet time". I promised myself to practise quiet time every day so I know about it more clearly. I got more ideas how to make a change and what I can do with my life. I'll start by trying to understand my sister more and making friends with Vietnamese so as to be a bridge between Cambodia and Vietnam.

Hemina Suresh Shah, UK/Kenya: I feel I have learnt a lot of important values and gained friendships to last a lifetime. I've come to know myself better and realise that my life has purpose - to change ME and make the world a peaceful place.

Kyung Hee Choi, graduate, Korea: When I heard about the *Life Matters* course I was worried because I am not good at English. But the course was

very interesting from the beginning. Friends helped me

when I found it difficult to understand. I learned about relationship, friendship, forgiveness ... These helped me to be more clear about my future.

Ishmael Idu Misale, Pastor, Solomon Islands: One subject I learned that helps me for my future ministry is Forgiveness. Forgiveness is the way forward. If we cannot forgive each other we cannot go forward. When you forgive someone who is against you, you have freedom. Freedom to do something.

Building relationships is important because if we cannot build one relationship with others we cannot achieve our goal of solving problems. That is another subject I learned from *Life Matters*.

Taira Masudo, student of international politics, Japan: Through this course I got self-confidence, trust in my friends, bravery and being positive. I feel refreshed.

'The world becomes less confusing'

Terrorism, corruption and integrity

Individuals can defeat corruption, writes Brian Lightowler:

In July three terrorists escaped from custody in a high security prison in Manila by, it is suspected, bribing the guards. A few days earlier a woman told me that she had not been able to pay for the erection of a garden fence by cheque as the builder, saying he had no bank account, insisted on cash.

Incidents so different, yet sharing the common root of corruption. The first made front page news around the world; the other was an everyday occurrence in Australia's cash economy.

Yet perhaps if we in Australia could address our \$20.7 billion a year loss of tax revenue through the cash economy, we would be better equipped to tackle the corruption that helps finance terrorism or destroys national economies as in parts of Africa and the Solomons. The Australian Tax Office is beginning to tackle the cash economy. But will it succeed unless we the people demand and practise a standard of integrity in our dealings?

I first became involved in the fight for integrity at the height of the corruption revelations by the Fitzgerald Enquiry in Queensland in 1988-9. I remember sitting down over several mornings for breakfast at 6.30 am with five others to discuss how we would address the issue. One morning I put on the table a proposal which I had written during an early morning time of reflection, later to be named *Our Decision for a Corruption-free Queensland*. It called on each of us to make a personal commitment to rigorous integrity, making restitution for any past errors, as a first step in answering corruption. After much discussion, the six of us signed it, restitutions to the tax office and the social security department were made, and we launched the "Decision" on 9 April 1989, reaching a wide public through the churches and the media.

Laboratory experiment

What took place in Queensland may be termed a laboratory experiment for larger action elsewhere. My wife and I lived in Taiwan for seven months in 1991 and were frequently asked by our hosts to speak publicly on what had developed through *Our Decision for a Corruption-free Queensland*. This

helped inspire Taiwan's *Clean Election Campaign*, which was launched in 1992 and became "a raging fire" against vote-buying and other forms of political corruption. The example of Taiwan triggered similar campaigns in Brazil in 1994 and in Kenya in 1997 and 2002.

As ordinary citizens who want to combat corruption it is worth keeping two things in mind: (1) There is an interconnectedness between the national and the international, the intimate and the global, between the convictions and actions of individuals and the attitudes and priorities of socie-

ty. So what we do matters. (2) We are also on the winning side according to the Davos Group of the World Economic Forum, who wrote in 1997: "We may be at a historical turning point in humanity's long wrestle with corruption ... A new global standard appears to be taking shape in human consciousness with potentially major ramifications for our institutions as well as our political and business lives."

Brian Lightowler is the author of "Corruption: Who Cares?" (Cauldwell/Grosvenor, 2003). His book documents examples of successful resistance to corruption.

ATSIC and the media

Ron Lawler asks for more truthfulness in the media - and says we can all help

In November 2002 the Commonwealth Government initiated a review of its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). The Review Team has just released a discussion paper as a first step in looking at how ATSIC might be better structured to meet its key objectives. It is not a review of ATSIC's probity and capacity to deliver programs.

I am mindful of the particular concerns around the leadership of ATSIC at the moment. As someone who felt led by the Almighty to work in public administration with Aboriginal people, I have worked in a regional ATSIC office for eleven years. Not only is it clean but the systems in place make it easy to be clean. Previous examinations of probity and capacity have stood the test for many years.

In the recent public coverage of Aboriginal affairs, truth has been a casualty. Yet truth is essential for a constructive debate. When issues of life, death and rights are as pressing for Aboriginal people as ever, we are still poorly served by our media.

There is a dearth of thoughtful, well-researched, investigative articles with suggestions for a way forward. Spin and misinformation have become predictable with some journalists.

If instead of simplistic pontifications the "shock jocks" of talkback radio would explore what ATSIC funds are actually used for they would discover,

for instance, that indigenous organisations deliver services from ATSIC funding at cost and not with a margin for profit as with outsourced mainstream employment services.

The crucial challenge is how to build effective partnerships between ATSIC and other government agencies that will make a difference. ATSIC is only a smaller, supplementary funder to the basic services that other government agencies are meant to provide. This is one area our media really should explore.

One obstacle is when people proffer "either-or" solutions to indigenous problems. Some suggest that we can have either recognition of inherent rights, or social and economic reforms. No, all of these must be addressed. We have the resources. We might yet have the will as a nation to really listen to the whole story.

To be builders and not destroyers we must decide to be part of a truthful society. Our country is in danger of becoming too tolerant of the lie especially if it does not affect me. Where should we start? What about no cheating on taxes via the cash economy, or honesty about travel allowances? You and I could all find where we can participate.

Ron Lawler is a public servant with ATSIS (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services).