

Solomon Peacemakers ask for MRA-IC help

Last month Newsbriefs reported on the visit to Canberra of a group of Solomon Islanders, led by Matthew Wale, Director of the Peace Office. They have now written asking for the help of MRA-IC both in the process of healing in the Solomons, and in training Solomon Islanders in the values needed for nation-building. Dr Stuart Phillpot will go next week from Canberra to confer with them on this.

Last month Matthew Wale was interviewed by Geraldine Doogue on Radio National's *Life Matters*. Introducing him she said:

In 2000, when the first shocking beheading occurred in the Solomons, and the many that followed intimidated Solomon Islanders into silence, one person spoke out. He talked on national radio, and wherever the opportunity presented, about the hundreds of killings. By then the police were so compromised, they had no serious interest in stopping the murders or even counting the bodies. So Matthew Wale, together with church groups, founded the Peace Office. It became the only open door of communication between the people, the Government and the militias.

Here are extracts from Matthew's response to her questions:

We are safe now, thanks to the presence of Australian and regional troops. But at the height of the conflict, I feared literally losing my head. I was playing an upfront role, so I was seen as a threat from the militia's standpoint.

Several times the militia came to our place. On one occasion they attacked us and looted, yelling "This is the night for your head." Another time they assaulted me in front of my kids. I was on the floor, and one of them put his boot on my neck and put his gun to my chest. He pulled the trigger, but the gun would not fire. He took out the magazine and loaded just one bullet. Again it wouldn't fire. We are very superstitious in the Solomons, so I said to him, "If you try again, it will

fire from the other end and you will get it." The three of them got into a stolen vehicle and left.

We've talked this experience through with the children. The hardest part for me is that I have no idea how they will respond later in life. But as a Christian I believe that God had his hand upon me, and that God wanted me to do the work I was doing with the churches.

As an accountant, I never expected to find myself in this position. I got involved because there was no leadership to address the issues. After the first beheading, everybody was shocked. After that people were still shocked but slowly it was being accepted. I felt strongly that I should speak out.

The core of the crisis is leadership. We have astronomical levels of corruption in our institutions. It is going to take far more than law and order measures to correct this. I would dearly love to get back to a quiet life. But because of the challenges we face, people like myself need to continue. We've got a Westminster system sitting uncomfortably on a traditional system. We need to embrace modernity in a way that does not result in us losing our cultural identity.

We in the churches are proposing a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. We hope this will be a process where individuals talk about their own stories and tragedies and gets responses, and through that the nation will engage with its own soul. This will enable us to examine to what extent some of our institutions are culpable, and it will be very important for our unity. Too much introspection would bog us down in the past forever. But a healthy dose is essential.

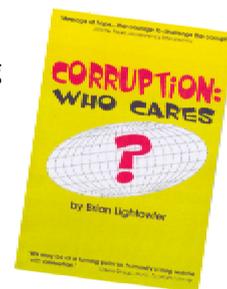
Transparency Chairman to launch book on corruption

Henry Bosch, Chair of Transparency International (TI) Australia, will speak at a forum 'Corruption - so what, who cares?' at Armagh, the MRA-IC Centre in Melbourne, on 30 October. The forum will be hosted jointly by Caux Initiatives for Business and TI Australia.

Mr Bosch, who was Chairman of the National Companies and Securities Commission, will launch journalist Brian Lightowler's book, *Corruption: who cares?* Mr Lightowler will also speak, as will Jim Carlton, management consultant and former Federal Minister for Health.

Reviewing the book in the July *TI Australia News*, Grahame Leonard says that the book "should be required reading for all". Ma Ying-Jeou, formerly Taiwan's Minister of Justice and now Mayor of Taipei, calls it "an important publication in helping readers understand the efforts and progress in the fight against corruption....on a global scale".

Corruption: Who Cares? may be ordered from the publishers for \$17.25 including p&p, or through your local bookshop, rrp \$14.95.



Grosvenor Books
P O Box 53
Burwood, Victoria 3125
Email: tomram@optusnet.com.au

Australians welcomed to Indonesian universities

Three Australians have just spent 10 days in Indonesia at the invitation of the MRA-IC team there. Rob Wood, a host at Armagh, went with Barbara Lawler, who works for the ABC, and university student Chris James.

The Indonesian team, which comprises mainly Muslim university students, welcomed them to stay at the new MRA-IC centre on the outskirts of Djakarta. They spoke at the State Islamic University and the University of Indonesia, met with members of Djakarta's Confucian Society, and travelled to Puncak where they helped to lead a two-day training course in MRA-IC for an inter-faith group of 30, mainly students.

A strategy for a real Australia

by John Bond, who works with MRA-IC and is Secretary of the National Sorry Day Committee

I see MRA-IC as a mission to heal the soul of Australia, in which everyone can play a part. Healing is an art and a skill. I am not much of an artist, but I am grateful to have been trained in the skills of Initiatives of Change.

The training starts with looking at myself, and accepting change where that is needed. Only as I recognise the effect of dishonesty and impurity in my own life do I understand its effect in society. Only as I learn to love can I glimpse what a caring society could be. Only as I discover faith do I find the strength to stand up to powerful forces, and keep on working for this vision despite setbacks.

Those who accept this training become sensitised to weaknesses in the body politic, and able to develop strategies to cure these weaknesses.

'Cruel and misguided policies'

When the *Bringing Them Home* report was published in 1997, exposing a tragic episode in our national history, I knew that this gave us a chance to cure the deep wounds resulting from the forced removal policies. So when the Federal Government attempted to ignore the report, I talked with my colleague Andrew Lancaster. We went to the leaders of Canberra's churches, and said that if they would invite Sir Ronald Wilson, the report's author, we would organise his program. They agreed, and in his three-day visit Sir Ronald reached thousands of Canberrans.

That led to involvement in the National Sorry Day, and since then it has been exhilarating to see the Journey of Healing develop, enlisting people all over the country in initiatives to heal the wounds. Many Aboriginal people who were angry and in despair now feel life is worth living.

In response to the million people who walked for reconciliation in 2000, the Government agreed to create a memorial to the stolen generations in Canberra, near the National Library. This got off to a bad start when they designed the memorial while refusing to consult the very people they were commemorating. This provoked outrage.

Our Committee went to the Government and said that the

memorial would only contribute to healing if it came out of consultation with all those involved – the stolen generations, and the people who staffed the institutions to which they were taken. We offered to conduct consultations. After a time, the Government agreed.

We consulted hundreds of people across the country, and found a genuine response on all sides. After some months, we reached agreement on a design and wording. It concludes: "This place honours all who have suffered under these policies. It also honours all those, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, whose genuine care softened the tragic impact of what are now recognised as cruel and misguided policies."

We took it to the Government. They tried to persuade us to tone it down. But they had no leverage, because we had reached consensus. Eventually they accepted it with minor amendments. Since this was announced, many Aboriginal people have contacted us in gratitude. Now we are finding that the Government is starting to heed the proposals we have developed on how better to help the stolen generations.

Car windows smashed

I believe that unless we move steadily towards healing and justice for Aboriginal Australians, we will face an explosion of hate. Half the Aboriginal population is under 25 years old, and over two per cent of these are in prison. Recently I attended a seminar by a Queensland academic, Professor Judy Atkinson, who is working in Australian prisons. "For Aboriginal people, our prisons are terrorist training grounds," she said.

If, however, we can answer the injustices, and respect our Aboriginal heritage, we will learn how to interact with people whose culture differs from ours. And that is vital if we are to build bridges of trust with our Asian and Pacific neighbours.

At present we are building more barriers than bridges. I was so scandalised by our treatment of asylum seekers that I put a notice on my letter box – "Asylum seekers welcome here". It was there for 18 months, provoked

discussion in *The Canberra Times* letters columns, and led to an article in *The Australian* headlined "Nobody wins treating refugees like dogs".

But the sign was vandalised many times, at dead of night. One morning I awoke to find our car windows smashed. So I took the sign down, and outlined our experience in *The Canberra Times*.

A humane refugee policy plays a vital role in our long-term national security, I pointed out. During Pol Pot's time, thousands of Cambodians found sanctuary in Australia. When he was overthrown, many returned to their homeland, and are developing the institutions which enable democracy to thrive, thanks to what they learnt here. If we want to establish democracy in Afghanistan and Iraq, why not start with the Afghans and Iraqis who are already here?

Burundi needs Sorry Day

One reader sent us \$50. "I thought your sign was quixotic, admirable and courageous," he wrote. "This country is changed for the worse, becoming small-minded and selfish. Yet how quiescent we all are, and what is the result when someone makes a typically larrikin Australian response, as you did? Out of solidarity with your spirit and recognition of its preciousness for the possibility of a real Australia again, please do me the honour of accepting this contribution."

He and his wife came for coffee. He turned out to be a man who served the Australian Senate for many years, finishing as one of its senior officers.

I long for that real Australia, a country which reaches out to meet the needs of the world. In August I spoke about Sorry Day at a session of the Agenda for Reconciliation at Caux, Switzerland. A man from Burundi, deeply involved in peace-making, came to me afterwards. "We in Burundi have so hurt each other in civil war that we need a day to say sorry to each other," he said. "Will you come and talk about Australia's Sorry Day?" Last month, at a national meeting of the Journey of Healing, I told of this request. "I will come with you to Burundi," said a stolen generations man from South-West Australia.

Among the co-workers at present in Australia are Anya Bondarenko from Crimea, and Cristina Cojocaru from Moldova, who encountered MRA-IC through the Foundations for Freedom (F4F) program in Eastern Europe. They put down their impressions for the 'F4F' newsletter:



Finding the balance between 'we' and 'I'

by Anya Bondarenko

In Australia it is hard to find anybody who is not passionate about the beauty of this country. Watching waves at the ocean, kangaroos in the bush and meeting people from every nation, I would say this is paradise on earth. Unfortunately nothing is perfect, and Australia has its own troubles. What I appreciate is how Australians cope with their problems.

We visited a school in Melbourne. One of the students said that the biggest problem in her country was apathy. Do you know what I felt? I felt ashamed not for Australians, but for my own country, for my people and myself. I wonder how many people in Crimea discipline their use of water when there is a shortage in our reservoirs? How many people would pay on public transport if there were no collectors? Australians treat street dogs better than we treat people in need. They understand that if they don't care, nobody will. 'We' consists of many 'I's and that can be difficult for us Eastern Europeans to understand, having lived under 70 years of communism with its dictum, "Initiative will be punished".

Australians have another problem: they often forget that each individual is part of society. Both countries need to find a balance between 'I' and 'we'. But people here are not afraid to take initiative, and even if they do not always find support, at least the Government does not impede Australian citizens from doing what they think is worthwhile. They are not afraid to apologise for mistakes.

The shame of Australia relates to the way the children of Aboriginal people were separated from their parents and taken from their land. It is amazing how many people understand this and are eager to say sorry to indigenous people who need this kind of recognition and acceptance of the wrongs of history. Attempts to heal the past prevent us making the same

mistakes in the future. This encourages me to learn more about the history of my country. We also have people who are victims of mistakes made in the past, who think that the community doesn't want to accept them as equals. Whether this is true or not is not important; what is important is that they feel that way.

The experience of living in Australia is very helpful for me. It helps me get perspective on my own country. I'm sure that Australians would also value coming to live in Ukraine. So, welcome!

A place to learn, grow and change

by Cristina Cojocaru

We stay at Armagh, the Australia-Pacific Centre for MRA-IC in Melbourne. It also serves as a community house, where people who share similar ideas and goals live together, and search for ways in which they can use their lives to make the world a better place. Since 1956 it has been a home for people from all over the world. Anya and I are among the first Eastern Europeans to spend time here! Living in a community is a lot of fun, but is not always easy. It often brings to the surface our weaknesses and limitations, things that we find hard to accept about ourselves, and personal issues we are reluctant to let others see.

It is also a place in which we can experience growth. Community is in some ways like family, so those who live in Armagh are called "the Armagh Family", which today consists of 10 members, but the number is always changing. Armagh is graciously hosted by Rob and Cheryl Wood, and Fetu Paulo who is from Samoa and cooks the most delicious meals! Anya, myself and a Korean girl are here as MRA-IC co-workers. This requires our

identification with, and commitment to, the aims and values of MRA-IC, and accepting the lifestyle of the community we live in. Included in this is full participation in all the aspects of its life: meetings, entertaining guests, domestic duties, outreach activities, and taking initiatives with a readiness to learn, grow and change.

Besides us the household also consists of three boys and two girls from Korea, Japan, Hong Kong and China, who study and work in Melbourne. Mike Lowe from England, who has been active in *Foundations for Freedom*, lives with his wife Karen and his two small sons in a small cottage attached to Armagh. We do a weekly book study together.

Armagh's activities are conducted by a diverse network of people and focus on relationships, community building, and conflict resolution. Australia is one of the most multicultural countries, and developing trust and confronting fear are essential to positive community relationships. One initiative is *Open Homes - Open Hearts*, a campaign which aims to provide opportunities for people of all backgrounds in Australia to reach out to those of different cultures and faith traditions.

In July Anya and I took part in the residential course for young adults, *Life Matters*, which aimed to train the participants in leadership, spiritual development, finding a sense of



personal identity, purpose and responsibility.

Once a week we do voluntary work at the Asylum Seekers Resource Centre and I find it eye-opening. I realise again and again how much I should appreciate the fact that in our countries at present there is no dictatorship, no torture and oppression, no war.

I often wonder about my path and my meaning in life. What is my calling? This is still not clear to me. But to sum up my experience here, it's "learning about life". And I am very grateful for the lessons I learn!

Springbok's story

Next week the Rugby World Cup will burst upon Australia, and among the leading contenders will be South Africa's Springboks. The oldest surviving Springbok is George Daneel who, at the age of 98, has published his autobiography in English. Daneel has worked full-time with MRA since 1953, and the book documents his struggle amidst the turbulence of the apartheid era, including the long letter he wrote in 1978 to Prime Minister Vorster, challenging him to acknowledge guilt, on behalf of white South Africans, for "prejudice and superiority towards black people". He received a furious reply, and their subsequent meeting was a one-sided lecture. But many years later Vorster told a friend about the letter and said to him, "Daneel was right." The book is available from Grosvenor Books for \$15 plus \$2 p&p.

Korean students in Japan

Last year a group of young Japanese visited Korea with the aim of helping overcome the distrust between their countries. Saeko Mita, one of the visit's organisers, says that they found their discussions with university students difficult because each side saw their history so differently. But they found junior high school students much more open.

On their return, they went to see the organisers of camps for Japanese junior high school students, and asked if they would invite Korean students to join a camp. After much discussion, the organisers agreed. The Japanese IC group raised the money to enable nine Korean junior high school students, two university students and a teacher to attend a camp of 560 Japanese students. It was not easy for the Koreans, writes Saeko. "Besides the language difficulties, a big typhoon hit the camp site! But we saw Japanese students taking care of Koreans and trying to communicate with them. And the adults who watched this began to try too. As for the Korean students, they grew to understand Japanese gradually as they put up tents together, carried logs, cooked meals. We believe that this

experience will help them and our countries' relationship."

IC webpage

Have you looked at the IC international webpage:

www.initiativesofchange.org ? It is full of fascinating information. Every week there is a new editorial, the latest by Mike Lowe, who tells what he has learnt from "being married to someone who is, in almost every respect, opposite to me".

Muslim and Christian leaders speak together

Muslims and Christians Sharing Common Values is the title of a forum to be chaired by Geraldine Doogue at St Paul's College, Greystanes in Sydney, on Friday, 17 October at 7:00 pm. The event has been convened by Keysar Trad of the Islamic Friendship Association of Australia, and Kevin Manning, Catholic Bishop of Parramatta. They will both speak, together with Wendie Wilkie, Associate General Secretary of the Uniting Church National Assembly, and Nahla Ghazzawy of the Australian Institute of Islamic Culture. Further information is available from David Mills, Tel: (02) 9599 1428.

Recitals and receptions

Meanwhile, life at Armagh buzzes along. In the last fortnight a trivia night brought 100 people to the home and raised \$1,270 for its maintenance; a piano teacher gave a recital for 100 of her pupils and their parents, with pieces by Grieg, Rachmaninoff and Tchaikovsky; and there was a pre-wedding reception for a couple who are part of the MRA-IC network.

Action for Life in Taiwan

A six-week program, *Taiwan Action for Life*, brought together 20 people in Taiwan, mostly university students. It began with two weeks' training in Tainan, conducted by Ren-Jou Liu and other Taiwanese, together with New Zealander Sarah Wood, and

Malaysians Julie Tan and Nandor Lim. The participants then divided into three for a month's fieldwork in Nantou, where an earthquake struck recently, working with French Catholic monks in another village, and in Tainan.

Pilots promote book

Met Along the Way, the new book by Jim Coulter, was launched to a Sydney audience at the Earlwood Ex-Servicemen's Club last month. Coulter was a pilot during the Second World War, so it was appropriate that the gathering was chaired by another pilot, flying instructor Roger Fraser. His brother Chris, a licensed skydiver, has made a five-minute promotion video for the book, featuring extracts of Coulter's talk at the event. Two hundred copies have sold so far, and Coulter says that most of them have been bought by people under 30. The Melbourne launch will take place at Armagh on 9 October.

At the age of 92, **Tom Gillespie** of Sydney still vigorously pursues his calling as an MRA-IC worker. Following the Cancun meeting of the World Trade Organisation and its struggles over globalisation, he has written his own **AGENDA FOR GLOBALISATION**:

We need a unifying purpose for humanity, big enough, broad enough, deep enough to satisfy the longings of everyone for a peaceful, secure world. It will come as we find a social and personal conscience that gives priority to the welfare of all people, especially the down-trodden and under-privileged.

The aim of globalisation must be to construct a fear-free, greed-free, hate-free world

- whose wealth and work are available for all, and the exploitation of none.
- where everyone cares enough and shares enough so that everyone has enough.
- of many languages, cultures and customs where each speaks the language of unselfishness.
- in which every person, without exception, can play a responsible part in the creation of a fair and free society.