



Initiatives of Change

Gandhi starts 14-nation tour in Indonesia

Rajmohan Gandhi, President of IofC International, has begun a 14-nation "Voyage of dialogue and discovery" across five continents. Joining him and Mrs Usha Gandhi in Indonesia, the first nation, was Rob Lancaster from Canberra, one of nine young people selected to support the Gandhis' mission on various stages of the tour.

The Indonesian visit, 9-12 March, was arranged by the young team of IofC Indonesia. It began with a lecture at the university where many of them studied, the State Islamic University (UIN), where Gandhi spoke on "Education, human rights and the global challenge for peace and harmony". The following day, the programme was at another university, UHAMKA. Both universities are affiliates of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, the two largest Muslim organisations in Indonesia – with 60 million members total.

In all these meetings, Gandhi emphasised the importance of genuine listening – both to each other, and also in silence for a deeper wisdom – and of reaching out in trust-building. At the headquarters of NU they were received by Dr Lily Munir, director of the Centre for Pesantren (Islamic Boarding Schools) and Democracy Studies, who attended last September's Creators of Peace conference in Sydney. She described from an Islamic perspective the way in which this listening approach had given her fresh insight into her own understanding of prayer and its meaning.

At the Gandhi Memorial School, Rajmohan told how as a young boy he had sat next to his grandfather, the Mahatma, at prayer meetings during India's freedom struggle. Kompas, one of Indonesia's largest dailies, ran an interview under the headline "Rajmohan Gandhi continues the ahimsa", featuring his "campaign for trust, reconciliation and democracy for more than half a century".

In South Africa, next stop on the Voyage, the Gandhi party – enlarged by now to eight – included visits to Robben Island prison and the ashram which the Mahatma established. At Pretoria University, Professor Gandhi launched a "Coalition of Conscience: building ethical leadership in public and private

life," which will be focused around conferences at Caux, Switzerland.

On their first morning in Kenya the Prime Minister, Raila Odinga, spent an hour meeting with Rajmohan Gandhi and others from IofC.

Full reports are available on www.iofc.org/gandhi-tour as well as on Facebook under 'Gandhivoyage'.



PHOTO: Rob Lancaster

Gandhi at Darunnajah Pesantren, Jakarta

Discovering new 'tools' in KL

An unexamined life is just not worth living.

That was the conclusion of Socrates, 2,400 years ago. And it was the conclusion of one participant at the end of last year's Tools for Change conference in Malaysia. And she went a step further: "I discovered that we are the tools for change – not just us, but the lived experiences of an examined life."

Continuing that same thought, this year's *Tools for Change KL* (4-8 March in Malaysia, with several Australians among the 80 involved) began with K Haridas, vice-chairman of IofC Malaysia, spelling out how an examined life can give "value-added gains" to anyone who seriously wants to become an "effective agent for change".

Many in his audience came from civil society organizations in Malaysia, Vietnam, Indonesia and The Philippines. One of them, Regina Morris, told how last year's *Tools for Change* thrust her into trust-building efforts between Malaysia's races. On one point, she found she could go no further without addressing the healing needed in wounded relationships within her family. From that emerged her initiative to launch several Creators of Peace Circles, along with Mrs Tia Haridas. At this

year's conference, they offered a Peace Circles workshop.

The *Tools for Change* format, borrowed from conferences at Caux, combines mornings of exploration of basic "tools" for change within and around us, with afternoons of professional skills training. This year, nine workshops were offered, ranging from "Creating passion in the workplace" to "Core values and leadership across cultures". An innovative workshop, entitled "The Spiritual Dojo", was facilitated by Alex Birnberg from Melbourne, with friends.

The annual "Tools for Change Lecture" was given by renowned social activist, Dr Chandra Muzaffar, one of the 18 authors of the "Charter of Compassion", launched globally last November. "Globalization makes compassion vital for the survival of humanity," he said. "The challenges such as environmental catastrophe, economic crisis and proliferation of nuclear weapons are all global. We *have* to connect with each other." (IofC is among the Charter's 100 partners.)

This year's conclusion? A comment, penned on paper on the wall: "Tools for Change is developing a network of compassion."

19th Life Matters Course: Young people making a difference

If you had walked into Armagh, the Australia Pacific Centre for IofC in Melbourne, on Friday evening of 5 February, you would have found yourself among 20 lively young people, meeting each other for the first time. While everyone spoke in English, their accents and appearances would have suggested that they came from Asia, Africa or the Pacific region: nine countries in all, including Australia. Some were university students, others had taken leave from work, and two had left young families to join the 19th Life Matters Course.

Why had they come? To begin with, their expectations were around the exciting prospect of “experiencing new cultures” and “making new networks”. Then it was the desire to be “more informed about the world”. The desire to find direction, said some: “I’m at a cross roads and looking for a life purpose.” For others: “To understand myself and others so I can improve relationships”. And for many, there was the hope of “making a difference in society”.

Over nine days all these were explored, with added input from visiting speakers who shared their life experiences with depth and honesty. Themes such as identity, resolving conflict, affirming values, building community, enhancing relationships and searching for meaning were opened up.

Learning to listen to the Inner Voice as a tool for finding connection, correction and direction became a daily practice. Throughout the course was the challenge to trust: to trust one’s own self, and to trust others in sharing the deeper experiences of life. Rock-climbing, dance and music workshops climaxing in a creative night added variety and fun.

Feedback

How far did the Course go in fulfilling hopes and expectations? Their feedback gives some insight:

“I gained the strength and inspiration to change, and made many good friends.”

“There is so much to gain from the world and even more to give. Quiet times give us direction.”

“A very unique environment and experience. I gained fresh insights into community, acceptance and values.”

“I have an idea of who I am and what I am going to do.”

“Inner Reflection and listening is very vital and has given me the courage to share my own stories.”

“The Course was incredibly beneficial. I learnt that forgiving starts from within, and gained fresh insights into mending relationships.”

Forgiveness was a challenge picked up by many. Before a public audience on the final night of the Course Mashuri, an Indonesian student, spoke of his need to forgive his father for something in the family that had hurt him deeply. “Everyone needs a second chance,” said Mashuri. “I must forgive him.” Referring to the spread of corruption in his country, he told of his decision to put things right with his lecturer about cheating in an exam.

As for “making a difference”, that public event gave a glimpse of it. Brendon, an Aboriginal Youth Coordinator from the outback town of Wilcannia, had taught the Course an Aboriginal chant in his own language. To the ring of the clap sticks (music rhythm sticks), with Brendon in full



PHOTO: Rohul Kapadia

Life Matters participants, faculty and helpers

ceremonial paint, the Course participants began the public evening with the chant, complete with actions depicting the gathering of food. In what Brendon describes as “an expression of reconciliation”, Andrew Flynn, an Australian of European background, accompanied him on the didgeridoo.

Doing the right thing



PHOTO: Rob Wood

Brought up in a Cambodian orphanage after leaving a difficult family situation when he was ten, Yun Sophat studied agriculture and is passionate about organic farming. He told the Course

this story:
When I graduated with a Masters degree from Thailand, I was offered a job in an organic fertiliser company in Cambodia. This company gave me a good wage and incentive. But several months later I realised that it was an unregistered company. I tried my best to persuade the boss to register and pay tax to the government. He refused and

told me this was the way to get rich in Cambodia. I told him I only wanted to get rich if it was with clean money. I also refused to train a woman employee in keeping two sets of accounting books, and she was sacked.

I decided to leave the firm because I could not accept this corruption, even though it has become part of the culture. I wanted to do the right thing. I was without a job and started to ask myself, “Did I do the right thing?” That is the reason I came to the Life Matters Course. Following the Course, I now understand more deeply about living right and have strengthened my moral and spiritual being. Quiet times (inner listening) are giving me a clearer sense of direction.

Continued on page 3...

'I gained the strength and inspiration to change'

'I learnt that forgiving starts from within'



Fixing up a blue

Having just completed a double degree in Sports Administration and Exercise Science, Australian Andrew Flynn is venturing into the Pacific to use the skills he has gained through his studies and life experiences, including the recent Life Matters Course. As an AusAid Ambassador to Samoa, Andrew will spend a year in this tsunami-ravaged country developing sport, especially cricket, with a focus on bringing communities together. Andrew spoke at a Life Matters occasion.

If we think about it, our damaged environment, racial and religious frictions, and our lack of genuine community are all caused by the ways we humans live and the attitudes we hold.

The LMC offered me both a chance to engage with these issues and also a pathway for positive change. It was about finding myself, understanding who I am and the difference I can make in the world. Each morning I participated in a reflection session, where I had to search inside myself for answers to my problems and find solutions to become a better person. I have now started on a path to finding my inner spirituality and happiness.

I was also given some tools for looking at life. One concern I had was the massive breakdown between my brother and me following a physical and verbal "blue"

Continued from page 2...

After losing my job I began to conduct personal research and now have an official laboratory certificate for producing organic fertilizer. When I return to Cambodia I will run my own registered organic fertilizer firm with honesty to make healthy vegetables and a clean environment for the country.

Postscript: Sophat reports that his former boss has recently registered his company and has asked to work with him.

between us. I hadn't really talked with him for three years and I came away from the LMC wanting to reconnect with him. We caught up for coffee. I said sorry for what I had done and was able to offer my forgiveness for what he has done to me. It really opened up a dialogue.

I believe an individual can be a powerful force for positive change in society. This change can be possible when we are at peace with ourselves and the lives we have led.



PHOTO: Rahul Kapadia

Andrew after playing the didgeridoo at the public evening



PHOTO: Rahul Kapadia

Anne with Ayom, Sudanese-Australian

That word 'absolute'

Anne Gibbons, community worker in country Australia and mother of two, writes:

Before I came to the Life Matters Course I had been searching for my identity, for somewhere to fit in, for some beliefs that were mine. At the LMC I discovered the four values of absolute honesty, purity, unselfishness and love. Values were not new to me. But what gives these values power is the word "absolute". That word somehow holds me totally accountable for both my thoughts and my actions.

During the Course I was able to face my fears. They do not hold any power over me any more. By facing them I had the strength, on returning home, to repair both broken and unstable relationships in my life. I was able to make new friendships – something I have struggled with a great deal since ending my cycle of alcohol, drug and self-abuse. Of course, the most difficult relationships to repair were with those closest to me.

The tool that has enabled me to face these individuals is love, absolute love. For me it is all about the intent behind my actions, to do things with "good heart". If I am clear about my values, I am clear about my intentions and this gives me the ability to speak with love and clarity. As Mahatma Gandhi said, "Whenever you have truth it must be given with love, or the message and the messenger will be rejected."

I now feel I belong and do have something to contribute to the world. What's more I am putting my thoughts into action. I am trusting myself. I am a part of God's plan. I feel valuable and I feel connected. I have gained happiness which gives me the energy to serve others and I have found my purpose, because purpose will always be found in service.

Creators of Peace goes for Gold

Queensland's first Gold Coast Creators of Peace Circle was completed in March, representing all the richness of Australian multicultural diversity. One of the ten participants, after sharing the realities of each other's lives, said, "Isn't it amazing that although we come from such diverse backgrounds, we have had similar experiences with depression, family deaths, confusing racial identity and so on."

Facilitator Lesley Bryant reported various learnings, such as: "I have come to value silence;" "After thinking about forgiveness, I have had a better relationship with my ex-husband;" "I find English difficult but I am very happy in this group, Alhamdulillah! (Thanks to God)". As new friendships have been formed, many have had to abandon preconceived ideas to realise that peace-building "starts with me".

Meanwhile, on 7 March in Sydney, Sydney-born researcher Jan Todd, who became involved with Creators of Peace after the Cronulla riots, and Senegalese-born Mariam Hijazi, a school teacher, together launched the Sydney Creators of Peace Conference Reunion and Celebration at the University of Technology. Over 50 women gathered to recall the conference last September and to hear news from around the world of Creators of Peace activities since.

Two funds were launched – one to enable Rosemary Kariuki, Kenyan/Australian CoP enthusiast, to attend the All-Africa conference in Kenya in May – and the second to enable two young Afghanis, chosen by Mahboba Rawi (a speaker at last year's CoP conference) to join the intern program in Panchgani in September. (Donations to "David B Mills Africa Fund", 64 Barnsbury Grove, Bardwell Park, NSW 2207).

After two months of introductory sessions, six Peace Circles are about to start in and around Adelaide. Publicity for the programme also came from a local newspaper, *The Hills and Valley Messenger*, in a 9 March article headlined, "Friendship circle helps bring cultures together" by journalist Alice



Therese Minitong-Kemelfield and Rebekah Brown in Adelaide

Monfries. It featured Peace Circle facilitator Rebekah Brown and participant of the first ever Creators of Peace Circle in 2003, Therese Minitong-Kemelfield. Therese shared the healing she found with another community through the experience and her own rebuilt confidence after coming to Australia as a migrant from Bougainville.

PHOTO: The Hills and Valley Messenger

Rousing the conscience of Oxford students

"I believe that in the next 20 years we can see the condition of Aboriginal Australia transformed. And many here today may play a part in that," was the opening challenge confronting 55 Oxford University graduates and undergrads at Rhodes House on 11 February, almost exactly two years after Prime Minister Rudd's apology.

John Bond, who was given the Order of Australia for his role as secretary of the National Sorry Day Committee, was invited to address a meeting convened by the University's Australia and New Zealand Society and the Oxford Comparative Indigenous Studies department.

Adopting the theme "Rousing the conscience of a nation", Bond gave the inside story of the movement for the apology and for healing which saw nearly a million Australians sign Sorry Books. The audience included Australians, New Zealanders, Canadians and others. "Among the Aussies there was a recognition that we have failed Aboriginal people, even in comparison with Canada and NZ," Bond reported.

"There are plenty of struggles ahead, to create a country to which Aboriginal people are proud to belong," Bond told them. "We cannot do for Aboriginal people what they must do themselves. But we can create the conditions in which Aboriginal people are able to flourish, and I am convinced this can happen.

"If Australia can work through this phase creatively, its life will be enriched by Aboriginal perspectives, its economy, environment and agriculture will benefit, its relations with its Pacific neighbours will find a new warmth, and Australians will be able to claim with justice that we have a multicultural society."

The talk, illustrated by video clips and slides, provoked a good deal of

discussion, first formally and then, appropriately, over lamingtons and strawberries. "A Hungarian maths student at Keble College told Bond that he had come because he thought that the way his country treated the Roma (gypsy) people was similar to the way Australia treats Aborigines. He has since written an article for a Hungarian newspaper, describing what Australia is doing, and suggesting that Hungary could learn from it.

Note: 26 May - 2 June is marked across Australia as Reconciliation Week.