



Diaspora from Australia to support reconciliation in South Sudan

Australians, black and white, are being asked by the Government of South Sudan to help launch their country towards national reconciliation, as it struggles to overcome the effects of 50 years of war and two million dead. A team with experience in the reconciliation movement in Australia and members of the South Sudanese diaspora will leave in the next weeks.

A “Journey of healing for national reconciliation” was announced by the Government of South Sudan in November. Ethnic clashes between rival groups have caused over 3,000 deaths in the past year. The campaign will be launched with a national conference, opened by President Salva Kiir Mayardit on 18 April, followed by a campaign into the 10 States of South Sudan.

Initiatives of Change has been asked to partner to facilitate the conference, drawing on its 80 years of experience in trust-building (see October and December *Newsbriefs*).

From Melbourne, Nyok Achouth Gor and David Nyuol Vincent – both “Lost Boys” who fled from the war and trained in Ethiopia as child soldiers, surviving years in refugee camps before coming to Australia – will be assisting the campaign. Both have been leaders in “honest conversations to break down the mistrust” between South Sudanese ethnic groups in Melbourne, and earlier with the people of north Sudan.

During the past year, Nyok has lost three close relatives in ethnic clashes within South Sudan. After the death of his cousin, Nyok approached another refugee from the opposing tribe and has built a close bond with him. Through months of regular meetings at Armagh, the IofC centre in Melbourne, a bond has grown

among these South Sudanese, now working for peace. They have held community meetings, spoken in churches and have been interviewed for ABC’s 730 Report due to be aired in Victoria.

On 2 February, they spoke to compatriots at a workshop hosted by Oxfam and other NGOs. “Being part of the IofC team advocating for the reconciliation process – boldly initiated by our government in South Sudan -- has been a great privilege and life-changing experience,” wrote Gatluak Puok Puoch, one of the group.

“During this presentation, I realised that every Southerner has been longing for peace. However, our confusion is where to begin. We have been reluctant to approach each other and discuss our feelings about the war, to forgive one another and move forward in trust. With my conviction for achieving peace in South Sudan, I realised that change should begin with me. I must forgive anyone who has done wrong to me first and advocate strongly for change.”

“Now I want to take this healing back to my country,” says Nyok. He and his Australian-born wife, Kathryn, have left their employment for three months to assist the campaign. They are seeking to engage the diaspora in Australia and other countries. A similar “Peace Initiative” has grown in Canada, supported by IofC, and will send representatives.

Nyok and Kathryn leave this week for Juba, the capital, together with Mike and Jean Brown from Adelaide, who are project managing IofC’s part in the project. Their task, with African IofC colleagues, is to bring people with convincing evidence of forgiveness and reconciliation from a range of situations such as Lebanon,

South Africa and Rwanda. Altogether some 80 international speakers and facilitators will be going for the April launch.

David Nyuol Vincent and Nigel Heywood will go soon after as trainers to prepare 200 “youth reconciliation mobilizers”, over four weeks before the conference. Rob and Cheryl Wood go in early April to join the IofC facilitating team.

Two fund-raising dinners – at Armagh in Melbourne, and at a church in Adelaide – have raised over \$17,000 for Australian participation in the campaign. Three Adelaide couples, inspired by their visit to IofC’s conferences in Caux last August, set the target of raising \$75,000 to support the Australian contingent. At their suggestion, a short video was produced, featuring Nyok’s story*. This amount would fund at least seven from the diaspora. So more is urgently needed.**

Rev. Tim Costello, CEO of World Vision, has endorsed this initiative to support the diaspora’s participation as a “force for healing and reconciliation, desperately needed in South Sudan”.

* Go to www.au.iofc.org



The Initiatives of Change website.

** Cheques made to ‘MRA’ can be sent to Accounts, 226 Kooyong Road, Toorak 3142

A journey of challenge and transformation



Credit: Mike Brown

I have travelled to numerous countries over the years but to receive an invitation to attend a wedding in Indonesia was a new idea for me.

Being of Jewish background, I naturally did some research about this mainly Muslim country – and discovered that officially there are only 20 Jewish people among the population of 260 million! Thankfully I accompanied Barbara Lawler, who knows the country quite well. It was a new experience for me to work on the basis of sharing thoughts from daily quiet times.

We spoke in five different secondary schools and three universities,

including at an interfaith seminar initiated by a young Muslim in the Seventh Day Adventist University. And we facilitated a two-day Creators of Peace workshop from our room at the State Islamic University.

I was born in Australia but my parents were from Vienna, refugees from the holocaust in which all four of my grandparents and other family members were killed by the Nazis. This had lasting effects on my parents, then on my own life and also my two sons. For the first time, I found the courage to talk publicly about my experience of visiting Germany years ago, when I found the freedom of heart through forgiving the Nazis for the holocaust.

So my background influenced me greatly on this visit –that is where my passion to build bridges across the world's divides, regardless of

difference, has come from. We must never forget our past, but seek healing and offer forgiveness where needed, if we are to create a peaceful world.

In the last school we spoke at, I remember looking out at a sea of hijabs and thinking how grateful I was for this chance to talk with young Muslims – as friends! During a ten minute quiet time, the young folk were invited to think about forgiveness, looking into their hearts in relation to family, community and their nation. Much honest sharing followed.

Indonesia, through these new young friends, has walked into my heart.

by Liz Brumer, Melbourne

Rudd in Paris at French-Algerian dialogue

In December Kevin Rudd was guest of honour at a public dialogue in Paris organised by IofC France on the 50th anniversary of Algeria's independence in 1962 from French colonial rule.

French-Algerian relations still remain highly sensitive. The dialogue coincided with the official visit to Algeria of French President François Hollande, and addressed the theme “Reconciliation process: what possible steps? France and Algeria: where are we at?”

Alongside Mr Rudd, the panel included Michel Rocard, a former Prime Minister of France, Laetitia Bucaille, a sociologist and author of *Forgiveness and rancour – France, Algeria, South Africa: can we bury war?* and Ghaleb Bencheikh, President of the World Conference of Religions for Peace (France) and member of a well-known French-Algerian family.

Luc Rouillet, President of IofC France, had invited Rudd after hearing him and Aboriginal representatives speak in Caux about the Australian parliamentary apology to the Stolen Generations. (See August 2012 *Newsbriefs*)

The evening began with a video (with French subtitles) of the apology

which Rudd had delivered as Prime Minister in the Australian Parliament, on 13 February 2008, in the presence of Aboriginal people from all over the country. According to the French IofC website, this “set the tone for an unforgettable evening”. A member of the Paris audience remarked on the intensity of emotion which “you could cut with a knife”. (See www.iofc.org/fr/node/67856)

Rudd went on to speak of what he had experienced personally and to reflect on the conditions an apology must fulfil if it is to be authentic and contribute to real healing. “It is almost as if the truth can set you free,” he commented. This phrase is headlined in the French report.

Michel Rocard said that the Australian Apology had been a “world event”, though certain favourable circumstances in Australia had helped make it possible.

The discussion then moved to the French-Algerian relationship. All speakers recognised the important differences between this relationship and that between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. As both Bucaille and Rocard pointed out, Algeria and France are two

separate countries with different understandings of history. Bucaille felt a non-religious approach would be most helpful in restoring equality and respect, preferring attitudes of “acknowledgement” and “responsibility” to one of “repentance”.

Rocard said that because of the violent history the first need was a complete examination in depth of the wrongs committed by both sides. This long-term historical task should be undertaken by France and Algeria together as part of building the future.

Bencheikh also wanted to focus on the future. While colonialism should be recognised as an “absolute abomination”, the task now was to draw together once more the countries bordering the Mediterranean that had been divided by colonialism and successive crises.

reporting by Jamila Barbouch, John Bond, Peter Thwaites

Reg Blow: reconciliation is my game

“More than 1000 people gathered at the Plenty Ranges Arts and Convention Centre to farewell Indigenous statesman Reg Blow,” reported the Northcote Leader, describing the final farewell to “a gentle giant who gave body to the words ‘reconciliation’ and ‘statesmanship’.”

In December Reg, a boxer in his youth, went down to the final count after a bout of cancer. His people from Queensland had come to join Walda, his wife from the Yorta Yorta people in northern Victoria, his children and grand-children.

“Two didjeridoo players played ahead of Reg’s casket as it was carried out, the spirit’s leading tangible as Reg went to join his ancestors, an amazingly effective life of commitment to all people,” wrote Barbara Lawler, National Coordinator of IofC Australia. “It was so evident that everyone was there because Reg was their friend – from those who participated in the Men’s Sheds that Reg set up to the police force whom he advised, the interfaith movement he chaired for a couple of years to the mayor of Whittlesea.” As the floor was opened for anyone to speak, “people flooded up, with tears and laughter marking the man Reg was.”

Sharon Firebrace, a long-time Indigenous colleague, spoke of his 40 years “leading the struggle” to address injustices: “His major concern was that in 2012 there was still no land rights or treaty in Australia as there was in other countries like in Canada.” Her sister, Shirley, described Reg as “a magnificent human being, rich in culture and so respected”. She had seen him transform lives by gently showing troubled young men how to reconnect with their spirit, culture, family and land.

Darebin Parklands Association president, Ingrid Svendsen, described the Aboriginal Healing Trail that Reg helped established in suburban Melbourne: a “healing place for quiet contemplation and meditation”. She described how Reg had calmed an ugly confrontation when, during

an anniversary of the parklands, protesting dog owners hurled abuse at a ranger: as Reg rose and played his didjeridoo, “a complete stillness descended... and a flock of rainbow lorikeets landed in the trees behind him.”



Credit: Laura Vertigan

His own ‘eulogy’

One could write a book on Reg Blow. In fact, one chapter of my book describes this exceptional man. He laid railway tracks out in the blistering heat to Mt Isa; and, as Advisor to Victorian Premiers Jeff Kennett and John Cain, helped lay the tracks for Victoria’s Land Rights Legislation. In his youth he share-farmed a 10-acre plot growing tobacco in Goondiwindi; and then, with Walda, set up a hostel for young Aboriginal men facing difficulties in suburban Dandenong. He was a brickies labourer; and “Aboriginal Australian of the Year”.

When I heard he had terminal cancer, I phoned him. From his hospital bed Reg was as buoyant as ever. He said he wanted his eulogy or epitaph (he couldn’t decide which) to be “unconditional love”. Reg had seen no shortage of things to make him bitter or angry. But his last words to me were: “When you live unconditional love, the past disappears. If you’ve got that,

resentments don’t stand up.”

Three decades ago I was one Australian whose life was forever changed by Reg’s embrace of love in the face of injustice. It was at a “Dialogue on Development” in India. He spoke starkly of the history of dispossession and injustice at the hands of white Australians. Then capped it all, saying: “By caring for our oppressors we give them a chance to change. But if we feed their race hate or indifference to us, then it will only allow them to justify their attitudes to us.”

In the silence following his talk, my indifference was forever shattered. I resolved to return to Australia and find the real history of my ancestors: a history which included a massacre of Aboriginal tribesmen in 1851 in outback South Australia. Discovering that, and experiencing the large-hearted forgiveness of people like Reg, thrust my wife and me into a journey of healing for our people and country – and far beyond Australia, even to South Sudan where we are joining the same journey.

In that last call with Reg, we talked about his earlier brush with death. Suffering from overwork, he had collapsed with double pneumonia and was rushed into an operating theatre. In hospital he had a vivid dream: of a painted Aboriginal elder coming to tell him the secrets of life. It was the start of a deeper spiritual journey which made all the difference. Surrounded by family and friends, he was baptised in the River Murray. “Good people are still good and nasty people, still nasty,” he said later. “But if I get stressed out, I just take it to the Lord.”

Moved by the moment, before hanging up, I said: “Reg, you are now becoming that Spirit Elder to lead others.”

“I got no fear: it’s all mapped out,” Reg responded. “My brothers and uncles are waiting beyond the veil. No problems mate. It’s all good. Closure now. You know, reconciliation is my game...”

Mike Brown, Adelaide

'Moral Re-Armament'* and Buddhism

In the Lao language, "Moral Re-Armament" is called "*Dhammavud*". It is a positive way of life, promoting changes for the better, in and around us, within ourselves, in our families, communities, countries and the world. It encourages reconciliation of hearts, mutual respect, purity of intent and sharing.

My involvement in MRA or *Dhammavud* began in 1957. I was 30. One of the prominent Lao leaders in the *Issara* (the "Free Lao" movement) and I attended a MRA world conference in Michigan, USA, in the autumn of 1957. Attending this world conference, I reviewed my life as it really was, and decided to do things differently. It was a turning point.

MRA is neither a new religion nor an old religion, but it has greatly helped those who want to seriously apply their own religions or beliefs. Even atheists have applied these secrets in their lives.

Buddhism and Moral Re-Armament abound with similarities; they blend together in a special way.

In Buddhism **Self-Purification** is of paramount importance. The *Dhammapada* (Buddhist scriptures), verse 165 stresses: "By oneself alone is evil done; by oneself alone is one defiled; by oneself alone is evil avoided; by oneself alone is one purified; purity and impurity depend on oneself; no



Tianethone and Viengxay Chantharasy
Credit: Nith Chittasay

one can purify another."

MRA also stresses the importance of purity... It is based on the absolute moral standards: absolute honesty, purity, unselfishness and love... The "absolute" transcends any conceivable limitations or determinations; it applies to the highest state of purity, unaffected by the opinions, desires or beliefs of men.

Buddhism emphasises daily **Meditation**, the importance of the mind. Meditation which can be practised anywhere, at any time of the day brings inner peace, insight and wisdom.

Listening to one's conscience or inner voice in MRA is a positive approach, a pro-active process. When one listens to conscience or inner voice, one is connected to the High Intelligence or "super-conscious".

Apart from the blessing of being born in Vientiane, the capital city of Laos where the Buddha's teachings have flourished, and where I learned

to meditate on the life of the Buddha and on his doctrine, the *Dhamma*, I am privileged to know how to listen to my conscience or inner voice. (This) listening has opened a new dimension in my spiritual growth, sharpening my intuition.

On this I quote Joseph Joubert's words (French moralist and essayist, 1754-1824): "Neither love nor friendship, respect nor admiration, gratitude nor devotion, should deprive us of our conscience and our discernment of good and evil. This is a possession we must never sell, which no price could ever purchase."

Through personal experiences, I have realized that there is no restriction to the possibility to seek inner guidance, leading me to be in exceptional circumstances and situations, to meet up with special people at the right time.

Tianethone Chantharasy was former Ambassador to India and Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in the last coalition government of Laos. In 1975 he and his family escaped the Communist Pathet Lao takeover with minutes to spare. They now live in Australia.

This article is an edited extract from his booklet "Moral Re-Armament and Buddhism: questions and answers". The full text is available on request.

** Moral Re-Armament (MRA) was the name used by Initiatives of Change between 1938 and 2001. Some national teams still retain the earlier name. The expression refers to the process of inner change.*

Leaving White Australia behind

Widely described as the "father of multiculturalism", Jerzy Zubrzycki "contributed enormously to the social development of this country", writes Malcolm Fraser, Prime Minister from 1975-83.

The Promise of Diversity, a new book by the late John Hartwell Williams and John Bond, published by Grosvenor Books, has just landed in Australia having been printed in the UK.

Zubrzycki AO CBE (1920-2009)

was born in Poland and, during the Second World War, served with distinction in the Polish Army, the Polish underground and with Britain's Special Operations Executive. He led the operation which brought a captured V2 rocket from Poland to Britain. After the war he studied sociology at the London School of Economics, then took up a position at the Australian National University where he became Professor of Sociology. Throughout his

career he worked to develop policies appropriate to Australia's increasing ethnic diversity – policies which have been implemented by governments on both sides of politics.

"A fine book on an admirable human being – the man who helped us leave White Australia behind," writes columnist Phillip Adams.

Pre-release copies available for \$15 from Grosvenor Books, at the Toorak address below.

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