

Solomon Islands

Winds of Change continue

The impact of the Winds of Change conference in Solomon Islands has continued to grow and develop in the Pacific Island nation since the conference was held in June. Mary Louise O'Callaghan reports:

A call for a follow-up meeting on the Sunday after the original conference produced a stunning 100 plus crowd of young and not so young who met to discuss how they as individuals and working together as a team might be able to transform their troubled nation.

This group has been meeting for an afternoon every weekend since. While numbers have come down to a core of about 20 to 30 people, discussions on issues ranging from corruption to reconciliation to family values to building a team have been held, usually led by one of the core team members.

Each meeting usually includes some quiet time and many wonderful and practical suggestions have come out of these meetings, which have been made possible by the generous financial support of a logger, Joseph Wong, who has also been active in MRA-Initiatives of Change in PNG. Wong has also donated the use of an office in central Honiara, which is in the process of being set up and a roster worked out for some of our youth members to man it.

Clean elections

During the weekend meetings it was decided to launch a Clean Election Campaign following the model devised by Joseph Karanja in Kenya - who was one of the keynote speakers at the June conference. This will be launched in time for the Municipal Council elections for the Solomons Capital, Honiara, which are due to be held early next year and follow years of corruption and maladministration in the capital.

It is hoped this will be a good testing ground for a more ambitious nationwide Clean Election Campaign for the 2006 General Elections.

The precise direction of this work and others on the issues such as reconciliation and forgiveness are expected to flow from

a team retreat, which will be held the first weekend of September with the kind assistance of David Mills from MRA-Initiatives of Change in Sydney.

Recently the *Winds* core team was approached by the Royal Solomon Islands Police to help them with a four-day workshop for 30 police officers wanting to build on and share the transformation some of them experienced through the original *Winds of Change* conference.

Weekly radio broadcast

The RSIP have been undergoing a painful but necessary purge since the arrival of the intervention forces just over a year ago and the team thought it a wonderful opportunity to walk alongside these officers in their efforts to rebuild trust and integrity within and between their members.

A series of radio programs, entitled *Winds of Change*, has also gone to air on the national broadcaster SIBC using David Mills' song *Winds of Change Over Solomon Islands* as its theme song.

The programs each feature an edited version of a key conference session such as the moving and revealing presentation from the Melanesian Brothers, an Anglican Community who lost ten of their members during the conflict, and the powerful presentations of African speakers, Ginn Fourie and Letlapa.

This is broadcast from 5.30 to 6 pm every Sunday on short and medium wave giving people all over the country a chance to hear the powerful stories of transformation and forgiveness that so moved participants at the June conference.

Mary Louise O'Callaghan lives in Solomon Islands. Her husband, an Opposition MP, was a convenor of the Winds of Change conference. The 8-page conference report can be viewed on the Initiatives of Change website: www.iofc.org.



Erin Tuhanuku and David Mills in Honiara

'More in common than we think'

The third - and largest - of the recent Muslim/Christian community dialogues in Sydney took place in the northwest "Hills" region, hosted by a group of citizens from that area.

On a chilly July evening, around 800 people packed into the main hall of Oakhill College, a large Catholic school in Castle Hill. The chairman was Richard Glover, presenter of *Drive*, ABC 2BL's popular afternoon program. The theme was: "More in common than we think".

The *Hills Shire Times* reported the event in a full front page article and headed its editorial, "Meeting of minds inspires hope". The paper wrote, "People from various backgrounds spoke from their hearts. Questions were asked, answers were given and curiosity was high. It is wonderful to see friendship and interest fuelled rather than fear and suspicion."

Samoan conference in October

Malcolm and Joyce Fraser from Sydney have taken two weeks off work to assist Fetu Paulo in Samoa with preparations for the conference *As I am, so is my nation*.

Joyce writes that Fetu has been meeting every week for months with a lively team, including many young people preparing songs and skits. The Prime Minister of Samoa has accepted to open the conference.

The conference runs 20-24 October 2004, in Apia, Samoa. Application details from the Melbourne MRA-IC office, 03 9822 1218).

Caux impressions 2004

The 2004 Caux summer conferences ended with an address by Mrs Sadako Ogata, former UN High Commissioner for Refugees and now President of Japan's International Cooperation Agency. As she left after supper she was surrounded by a group of Africans singing as they came down from the Catholic Church after a mass. She discovered that the Catholic priest from Burundi leading the singing had lost many of his own family in the recent massacre in a refugee camp on the border with the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Throughout the six weeks people prominent in humanitarian and peace-making work, from the UN, governments and NGOs, have laid some of the world's most desperate needs before the assembly.* At the same time there was the glimmer of hope in that these needs ultimately required moral and spiritual answers, and at Caux the moral and spiritual approach is being attempted.

As Lech Walesa, Poland's former President, pointed out during his visit: "You can change a government in a night, and laws in the life of a parliament, but a change of mentality is vitally important..."

Andrew Stallybrass writes in the final Caux newsletter:

Creating a space for peace" was the title of this "Agenda for Reconciliation" (AfR) conference. The efforts of so many have made it possible: the teams working through the year on the ground in so many places to bring the people; the work on visas. Then here in Caux, the interns running so many of the work departments... In the closing meeting yesterday afternoon all the different work groups were brought to their feet, recognized and applauded. It is an amazing enterprise, the way we make up this "conference in community". It is so different from the many conferences taking place at the other end of the lake – and yet complementary. And this to and fro with Geneva has been one of the hallmarks of this season.

Great Lakes Round Table

So much of the world's suffering has been here – notably this week with the presence of many from Israel and Palestine, and from Africa. For three days we have had with us the United Nations Under-Secretary Ibrahim Fall, Special Representative for the UN Secretary General for the Great Lakes region [Rwanda, Burundi, D.R. Congo, Uganda, Tanzania]. He met here with the "Great Lakes Round Table". There were notable contributions by a police and army group from Sierra Leone, by South Africans, black and white, and people from Sudan.

The media have never in my experience shown such interest in what goes on here. On the Sunday, four from the "Geneva Initiative", two Israelis, two Palestinians, spoke to a packed hall. This "civil

society" initiative had been brokered over two years in great discretion by Professor Alexis Keller of the University of Geneva, who came for several days. The Grammont Room was crowded with press afterwards. Within hours, the search-engine on my computer was producing "hits" as web sites and newspapers carried the news. The French-language Swiss radio carried the news in its main bulletins on the Monday morning. The leading Swiss Internet service provider carried it on its home page. The local newspaper headlined the event on its front page immodestly: "After Geneva, Caux takes the initiative".

*The 18 news releases are on the Caux website: <http://www.caux.ch>. Programme and texts for the 2005 conferences will also soon be available.

International Indigenous meeting

Indigenous leaders from four continents met at Caux under the chairmanship of Pavel Sulyandziga, Vice-President of the Russian Association of the Indigenous Peoples of the North and the Arctic. The Aboriginal people of Australia were represented by Audrey Ngingali Kinnear, Co-chair of the National Sorry Day Committee.

The President of the Geneva Association of United Nations Correspondents, an Egyptian, was so interested to hear about Australia's Sorry Day and the Journey of Healing that she arranged a press conference at the UN building in Geneva for Audrey Kinnear and John Bond.

The path of God

During Lebanon's civil war Muhieddine Shihab was commander of a Muslim militia. Today he is the Mayor of Ras Beirut, re-elected on a Christian-Muslim ticket, and a writer in the Beirut newspaper An-Nahar. He spoke to a small group at Caux:

I thought that the power of guns and conquering the other would win me security and inner peace. The result was horrendous and I was transformed from a human being to a killer fighting for personal security.

After the war finished, I strove for and got official positions and money, but I always asked myself, where can I get personal security and inner peace? I did not receive answers until someone told me: "in the hand of God." But how? The same person answered: "by repentance and forgiveness."

I asked him: "will God forgive a sinner like me whose sins piled together form a mountain?" He answered: "you have to repent sincerely and put your repentance into practice. Do not fear God but rather fear sins and you will find God the merciful everywhere."

I started four years ago on the path of God and I am starting to sense personal security and inner peace, to understand the significance of this world and to understand and reconcile with myself and others.

(Used with permission)

On the green team

Jan Knight from Port Fairy, Victoria, jotted down what her six days at the Human Security through Good Governance session meant to her:

I arrived feeling overwhelmed and somewhat lonely, but six days later sadness welled up when it was time to leave. So many friendships formed: Afghanistan, Canada, America, UK; sharing time, life stories, walks and cooking teams. (I was on the green team, so we were told to follow the green feet to our communities where we met after the morning plenaries!)

The Caux experience met all my expectations and even more as I felt an injection of new life and some answers. Moments I remember: Sermon in the chapel on "Taking time to listen and live"; picking raspberries with a new Swiss friend at sunset. It is a place that calls you back!

Asia Pacific Youth Conference, Cambodia

The town of Siem Reap owes its renown to the temples of nearby Angkor, the spectacular 12th-century complex which is the spiritual heart of Cambodia. From 22-31 July Siem Reap hosted 230 young people from across Asia and beyond, who came looking to the future.

The 11th Asia Pacific Youth Conference was hosted by the Khmer Youth Association and MRA-IC Cambodia, and took place at the Buddhist pagoda of Wat Rajabo. Participants from 28 countries included 85 from the host nation and large delegations from Vietnam, Indonesia, Taiwan and South Korea.

In one plenary a dozen people spoke briefly of one initiative each had taken towards reconciliation - whether in the family, workplace or community. Over three late-night conversations, Cambodian and Vietnamese groups began a dialogue on the hatreds and mistrust between their countries. The final plenary was hosted by Vichheka (Cambodia) and Ngan (Vietnam) wearing the national costumes of each other's country.

I was taught in school about the history of Cambodia and Vietnam. I felt that because of Vietnam my people are poor and things are wrong in Cambodia. Last year I met people who changed my idea about Vietnam, and I also started to change myself. I want to apologise to Vietnam and be a bridge between the two countries. (Khuon Vichheka, Cambodia)

Answer to racial prejudice

What can I offer for my Cambodian friends, while in my heart there is still pain from past experiences? I would like to apologise to Cambodians for what has happened and what is happening. Will we still carry that mistrust and hatred or will we find a way to work together? (Le Thy Truong Ngan, Vietnam)

A Malaysian Chinese, a Javanese Indonesian and an Indonesian Chinese shared the stage to speak of how they had each found an answer in their heart to racial prejudice, and committed themselves to work for inter-racial bridge building in their countries. A Cambodian student decided to write for the first time to her father in France, who left her family when she was a child. A young Indonesian undertook to repay money obtained dishonestly from his father. Another pledged to work to build trust between Muslims as well as with other faiths. Meanwhile 23 participants found time to donate blood at a local children's hospital, to help combat the current epidemic of dengue fever.

In Cambodia corruption is estimated to cost the country one billion dollars annually. Chea Vannath, president of the Centre for Social Development, spoke of her work to combat corruption. One of the CSD's initiatives is a "Transparency Task Force" with a curriculum to be integrated into the entire school system -

teaching children about honesty, integrity and accountability. A participant later wrote: "I defrauded a lot of money when I was on the welcoming ceremony committee for new students in my university. I realised that it was wrong but never had the courage to give back the money to the university. During the APYC I decided to do so."

Chris Lancaster and AfL Newsletter

Note: A full report will be available from MRA-IC centres and at www.iofc.org.



Teresa Lawler (left) and Chris James (right) with Cambodian Buddhist monks attending the Asia-Pacific Youth Conference

"Be the change you want to see in the world" - the story of Action for Life

The Asia Pacific Youth Conference was also the final stage of the 9-month Action for Life (AfL) program during which 40 people from 20 countries visited towns and communities in 13 countries across South, South-East and East Asia.

Action for Life's remarkable journey (or journeys because they travelled to many places in smaller teams) is captured in a colourful 24-page report with stories and personal comments by participants including seven from Australia. It is entitled "Be the change you want to see in the world", and is available from MRA-IC centres.

Clara Cheong, an Australian participant, takes stock on her return to Sydney:

Throughout our journey we were faced with questions about our world, about our motivations, our fears, our hopes and our lives. One particular question has stayed in my mind. At *Pengasih* (love without conditions), a drug rehabilitation centre in Malaysia based on a therapeutic community that stems from the Oxford Group, written on a dormitory porch is: "Why am I here?"

If I had asked myself this question five years ago, the answer would have been to get a good degree, please my parents, find a good job, earn lots of money and be a good daughter.

If I had asked myself this question two years ago, the answer would be roughly the same, with the addition of doing "my bit" for the world, by donating to a charity

and supporting those working for good.

When I ask myself this question now, after nine months on *Action for Life*, and exposure to extraordinary people, places, experiences and initiatives on our journey throughout Asia and deep within, the answer is not so straightforward.

So why am I here? This question now grabs me and opens my eyes to what my life can offer if I am willing to listen, have faith and follow that voice of truth inside us all. What is important for the growth of myself, my family, my community, my country and my world? Here in Sydney life could be easily lived in a state detached from the problems of our world, but this question remains in my mind and challenges me as I search for the next steps in my life.

"Peace Circles" in Sydney

A young Sydney woman read on the web about the IofC program "Creators of Peace" and the discussion groups called "Peace Circles", and asked for help to start one.

In August twenty women gathered in the sitting room of the *L'Arche* community in Burwood to meet Pari Sanyü, educator and social worker from Melbourne and Nagaland (NE India) who has helped to organise groups for women from different cultures in Melbourne.

Those present represented Christian, Muslim and Buddhist backgrounds. One had travelled over an hour to be there and had a baby at home who would be needing a feed at the end of the

afternoon! There was enthusiasm about forming groups in different areas of the city and to commit to a series of eight meetings.

Earlier, the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies at Sydney University invited Pari to speak to some of their students about her work with the program *Managing Conflict Creatively* with young people in Nagaland.

Rosemary Thwaites

Decision-making processes revised

The Global Consultation that met in Caux 2-6 July 2004 has produced a revised basic document for the decision-making structures and processes of the global Initiatives of Change fellowship.

The 8-page document, which accompanied IofC's July/August *World Bulletin*, is called *Initiatives of Change - worldwide: International consultation, communication and decision-making*. It defines tasks and schedules for the Global Consultations, the International Council, the Panel of Elders and *Initiatives of Change - International* (the International Association affiliating IofC and MRA legal bodies around the world.)

Initiatives of Change - International is itself a legal body registered in Switzerland with its seat at Caux.

While the basic structures created five years ago remain, there are many adjustments. Two of general interest are:

- Global Consultations are now to be held at two year intervals, leaving more space for regional, national and other gatherings. The International Council has the option of convening additional Consultations.

- Terms for members of the International Council are now four years, extendable by two years.

Anyone wishing to obtain the document can apply to MRA-IofC centres.

NEW from Caux Books

The Spiritual Movement from the West: an essay and two talks by Grigory Pomerants, translated by Australian, Peter Thwaites.

Prominent Russian scholar and writer Grigory Pomerants visits the West after the end of the Cold War and discovers MRA (now Initiatives of Change). He finds a "movement of spiritual openness" applying in practice some of the key insights that he had reached in years of research, reflection and life experience.

"Grigory Pomerants is one of the most

profound and influential essayists in contemporary Russian literature," writes Michael Ulman, formerly of Leningrad University, now at the University of New South Wales.

Books can be ordered from Joyce Fraser, Sydney agent for Caux Books, 22 McGowan Ave., Marrickville, NSW 2204; Tel 02 9559 2301; email: fraserjm@optusnet.com.au. Cost: \$20

Louise Abraham 1928-2004

"Teachers have a great responsibility for the future of civilisation," wrote teacher Louise Abraham, who came from South Africa to live in Melbourne in 1975 and died in August.

She educated her students for living, not just the "three R's". She wrote, "Every parent and teacher is confronted with the burning question: 'What sort of future are these children going to have?' Most of us think of it with feelings of fear and doubt. I think if children can become God-led and God-inspired they will be ready to face all the problems the world has ready for them."

Louise had a simple plan for "listening" for direction in her morning quiet time. THANK: What am I thankful for? SORRY: What am I sorry about? CHANGE: Where do I need to change? DO: What do I need to do today? WHO: Who do I need to care for?

A boy in one class was very disruptive in her lessons. She looked forward to the parent-teacher meeting. But as she entered the room she had the strong thought, "Begin with something positive". So she told his mother, "Your son has great leadership potential". The mother burst into tears and told Louise that her older son was on drugs and the father drank, and she was at her wits' end. Next morning Louise entered the classroom, surprised to find everyone quietly sitting at attention. The boy's mother had told him what she had said. No one had ever praised him before. He had told the class to be quiet and listen to what Miss Abraham had to say.

Lorna White

Correspondence

A reader in Western Australia has sent a contribution of \$50 for *Newsbriefs*. She writes: "I'm always grateful that you still remember mailing me the *Newsbriefs*. Every month I take it to the prison and share the items with some of my inmate students. Slowly some of them realise that there is a world of love and caring that they may share."