

Indonesians look for partnerships as 'co-travellers on divine journey'

When terrorists in Iraq beheaded an American journalist 18 months ago, the leaders of two Indonesian Muslim organisations, with over 70 million members between them, went public in their condemnation of this 'spiral of inhumanity'. Earlier this year, the same two organisations announced a program to tackle corruption using cultural and religious values. Rob Wood writes of meeting representatives of both groups when he and Yeon-Yuk Jeong from Korea visited Jakarta in September:

"If you know Nahdlatul Ulama and you know Muhammadiyah, then you know Indonesia," someone told us during our recent nine-day visit.

Last May, when two senior Indonesians were invited to be our guests at the *Initiatives of Change* Brisbane conference, we were probably not fully aware of their significance in their country. Rozy Munir is Vice-Chair of Nahdlatul Ulama, the largest Muslim organisation in the world. Dr Habib Chirzin, a Human Rights Commissioner, comes from a family closely associated with Muhammadiyah over four generations.

Sharing common values

On his return home from Brisbane, Dr Chirzin emailed Australian friends that we are "co-travellers on this divine journey. As a Muslim I share common values and concern with *IofC*." He particularly responded to a session on building trust and overcoming corruption "which is currently becoming our common concern in Indonesia".

From the moment we arrived, both men and their families looked after us wonderfully, offering accommodation, food and transport at every turn. They arranged for us to meet their friends in positions of public responsibility. They have a fatherly attitude towards the youth in the *IofC* team, in spite of the huge gap between them in terms of backgrounds.

In fact, the "Youth Camp for Peace" which we went to Indonesia to attend, was held at Rozy Munir's property in the mountainous region of Puncak. Among the 50 youth there were students of the State Islamic and Christian Universities of Jakarta. Speakers addressed the dynamics of change and practical

peace-making. One was Abdul Kadir Sambolangi, until recently President of the Indonesian Students of Victoria University in Melbourne. He shared his decision to forgive those from a political party who, following his father's resignation from a party position, had carried out a vendetta against his family.

This spirit of practical peace-making also featured in encounters back in Jakarta. We appreciated how the leadership of the Muhammadiyah Youth are building relationships between different communities, for instance through a camp next December to bring together people of 12 different faith traditions. When they heard about the Jakarta *IofC* team

Island by island, village by village a strategy for the Solomons

Known as the "Winds of Change" group, a delegation of 25 Solomon Islanders attended the recent Initiatives of Change conference in Brisbane. This energetic team of both young and senior people are committed to the healing and transformation of their country, and are planning a Clean Election Campaign (CEC) in the run up to the March 2006 elections. In preparation for this they requested a workshop for the young people who will train the CEC team. In response Liz Weeks, Natasha Davis and John Mills flew to Honiara in August. John and Natasha report:

The six-day "train the trainers" workshop was held at the Melanesian Brothers' rural campus outside Honiara, a magnificent setting for a most moving and energizing week. Seventeen young people – mostly male students, but including a carpenter, plumber and other vocations - took part in the workshop which was modeled on the *Life Matters* course run annually in Melbourne.

Topics ranged over family life, reconciliation and corruption, from "Facing the facts of history" to "Team-work and story

hosting both *Action For Life 3* and the *Asia-Pacific Youth Conference* next year, they were eager to get involved.

After a former member of parliament remarked that Australia was "Indonesia's enemy", I felt that I should take every opportunity to apologise for the arrogant and ignorant attitudes of some Australians towards their nation. In many I met, I found a strong desire to build a positive relationship. We followed up the idea discussed with Munir and Chirzin at the Brisbane conference of establishing "sister schools" between some of the Pesantran (Islamic boarding schools which are the back-bone of the education system) and schools in Australian cities that teach Indonesian studies.

Ending negative attitudes

At the State Islamic University 160 students came for two hours to meet us. When in silence we searched for God's guidance, some found steps they could take to put right negative attitudes and relationships, especially in their families. One lecturer summed up the importance of this way of inner listening: "Life is about choices. Choices are about priorities. Priorities are about wisdom – and wisdom comes from God."

This was my third visit to Indonesia in three years and each time I find the situation of *IofC* Indonesia is quite different. I give thanks for the sense that God is at work in the life of that country in unexpected and significant ways.

sharing". Each day started with a time of inner reflection and sharing in small groups, and there was also plenty of fun with games, music and lots of interaction.

Over the days trust was deepened and many hearts were touched as the highly creative young people searched for meaning in life. Some came with wounds, quite literally, as one young man showed us a scar from a bullet where he had been shot in the

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shoulder in an unprovoked attack by someone of another ethnic group several years back. With courage they sought how to transform conflict, dishonesty and pain into forgiveness, transparency and healing in their families, their communities and their nation by starting with themselves.

No longer avenging

A number of very painful experiences from family breakdown and the recent ethnic tensions were shared for the first time. One young man spoke of losing eight of his wider family in the fighting. His remaining family expected him to avenge those deaths, but he feels he can no longer do so and will seek the way of forgiveness, even if endangers his own life. He has gone back to his village to do this before engaging in the CEC.

One evening the Melanesian Brothers asked to see the drama which is used to present the CEC ideas. On a warm tropical night in an open grassy space lit by one large floodlight, the students entertained the brothers for one and a half hours with songs, spoken convictions and imaginative drama through which they presented a series of engaging and humorous plays about a corruption-free election.

The Brothers were thrilled with the "message" and offered to take a "skeleton message" with them when they disperse to the villages on their own outreach programs.

Village to village

The team who participated in the workshop will now be offering similar training to others who wish to join *Winds of Change* and be part of a hoped for 12 outreach teams (12 people in each) to go out to the many islands which make up the Solomons. It is a large and expensive task. In giving their services, they will go from village to village asking people to make an integrity pledge that includes rejecting bribes, not selling their vote, and voting for an honest leader.

The budget for this hope-giving initiative is around \$300,000 which they are now raising. A Solomons businessman has made an office available to them to have as a base for training and operations in Honiara.

What in the world's happening?

The last Newsbriefs sent was in June, just as the regional conference on the theme "Together... making a difference" was starting in Brisbane. During September, in the place of Newsbriefs, you should have received a printed report of that Conference. (Further copies are available, see page 4). Much has developed from it. Here's a brief survey of some events over past months, in Australia and around the world:

From Brisbane to Jakarta...

Dr Habib Chirzin (*see page 1*) thanked those who hosted him in Brisbane, having left with "a profound feeling that the conference was a kind of Pilgrimage". Back in Jakarta, he immediately met with 25 young Indonesians in *Initiatives of Change* who later hosted visitors from Australia.

South to Melbourne...

Eleven young people, mainly from Asia and the Pacific, stayed on after Brisbane to meet conference participants on the Gold Coast, Sydney and Melbourne. In Armagh, the Australia-Pacific centre of *Initiatives of Change* in Melbourne, they interacted with "inspirational guests" including the chair of the Victorian Ethnic Communities Council, Chinese students and a young Palestinian from Gaza. They were present for a second trust-building North-South Sudanese Youth Dialogue (the first was in June).

... and east to the Solomons and then to Switzerland

The 25 Solomon Islanders returning from Brisbane went straight from Honiara airport to a Trade Fair where a Clean Election Campaign stand had been set up and they were expect to speak.

While they got moving on plans for training programs to prepare for elections (*see page 1*), Matthew Wale - the founder of the Civil Society Network whose participation in the Sydney conference two years ago sparked these developments - flew to Switzerland to speak at the international conference at Caux on *A world in crisis: learning from one another how to be peacemakers*. (See www.caux.ch) Telling how he was repeatedly threatened with execution, Wale took his audience through the pain of the conflict and spelt out his efforts to make forgiveness real.

Wale connected particularly with the 22 Somalis in Caux, 10 of whom has been sent by the Prime Minister of the transitional government. Some of the Somali exiles in Britain are preparing workshops

to aid reconstruction efforts in their country.

Never too young

The youngest participant was two months old and kept falling asleep in meetings; the oldest 89. *An intergenerational experience of community living* was a highlight of the Caux conferences. Half the 480 present were under 40. Organised mostly by Norwegian families, the interactive sessions delved into such questions as: "What ideals and values mean most to me? What does commitment and faithfulness mean in my life?"

Moved to the core

Among the 22 Australians who joined the Caux conferences over six weeks in July-August were indigenous musician Johnny Huckle and John Bond, both from Canberra. They "moved us all to the core" (as one of the audience put it) telling us of Australia's Journey of Healing". In his song *I'm living on the right side of me*, Johnny described his victory over alcohol and despair.

'Journey' to the UN

John Bond, Secretary of the National Sorry Day Committee, came to Caux from the United Nations in New York. In 2001, Secretary-General Kofi Annan urged NGOs "to organise an international conference on their role in conflict prevention". A Dutchman, Paul van Tongeren, responded and his small organisation raised the money to bring together 900 from NGOs across the world. Bond was one, having met van Tongeren at Caux. At the conference, *People Building Peace* - a book compiling 65 stories of creative action by civil society organisations - was launched. Several of the stories have their origins in *Initiatives of Change*. One chapter, by Michael Henderson, is headed "The Spirit of Caux". Another was contributed by Bond. The book was compiled by van Tongeren's organisation, the European Centre for Conflict Prevention.

More news on page 4

National Gathering launches a new name...

After consultations across the country, 52 people at the National Gathering in Talbingo, NSW, in the first weekend of October decided overwhelmingly to adopt "**Initiatives of Change**" as the operating name for Moral Re-Armament in Australia.

Feedback from the earlier consultation process had showed that 64 per cent of the respondents favoured changing to the new name, while 22 per cent preferred to remain with "MRA-Initiatives of Change".

The decision made at Talbingo is in keeping with the name adopted by the movement internationally three years ago, and by the network in others countries.

"Moral Re-Armament" as a theme, and then a name, was launched in 1938 in Europe and America during the pre-War period of military re-armament, rallying individuals and societies to a commitment to social change through moral and spiritual transformation. As the National Coordination Group made clear, "we will continue to embrace the core truths which are crucial to making both the 'initiatives' and the 'change' contained in the name real and effective."

To underline this commitment, those at the National Gathering selected a "tag line" to be used with the name in print – "**through moral and spiritual transformation**".

For legal and financial purposes "Moral Re-Armament" will still be used – and any contributions should also be made out to that name.

Marking this change, a media release is being sent to major newspapers across the country, together with the report of the recent regional conference in Brisbane.

... and new initiatives

In contrast to the peaceful mountain scenery around Talbingo, those at the National Gathering spent almost two days looking at concerns and challenges of the world around us – everything from fear-based reactions to terrorism to the lack of moral content in leadership; from climate change to violence in relationships. And then, equally challenging, issues facing *Initiatives of Change's* program around the world.

We spent an evening praying and lighting candles for particular people and concerns. And we shared each day in small groups.

On the last morning a stream of fresh and continuing "initiatives" surfaced. To mention some:

- Heartened by what is growing in Solomon Islands, Ratu Meli Vesikula confirmed that he and his colleagues in Fiji would host a Pacific conference in late 2006, to strengthen national reconciliation, constitutional reform and justice on the land issues. (When Ratu Meli asked for help, at least a dozen hands went up);
- After evaluating the impact of the Brisbane conference, our strong consensus was to maintain the momentum with a further regional conference in Australia in 2007;
- The four public Muslim-Christian dialogues in Sydney and in Brisbane will continue, developing an agenda of

"creating partnerships of trust to answer the fear, greed and family dysfunction in the life of Australia".

- Likewise in Melbourne, the response of the Islamic community to *Discover the Other* workshops opens up promising work;
- We agreed we are entering "a decisive decade in our commitment to building relationships of trust with Indonesia" – and ideas were tabled on how to take that commitment forward;
- A message from Papua New Guinea friends outlined four clear initiatives, including relaunching a series of "nation-building" courses already piloted in Milne Bay;
- Follow-up visits to the Solomons are being planned to support the *Clean Election Campaign* team;
- On a resolution of the Publications Working Group, we decided to appoint and employ a part-time "Communications Officer" (*see box this page*);
- The *Farmers Dialogue* continues, in India during November and, before that, with personal visits of Phil and Margaret Jefferys to farmers in NSW and Victoria;
- The next *Life Matters Course* in February potentially has 25 participants, has some excellent new faculty members and needs more;
- A consensus decision was reached on financially assisting Australian participants and "Support Team" taking part in *Action for Life 3*, which begins in India next month;
- Ideas are forming to mark the 50th anniversary of Armagh next June, and Clara Cheong outlined a review – "a whole year of idea-creation" for resourcing and using Armagh in the future.
- A visionary plan to "celebrate and recognise" in 2008 the 100 years since Frank Buchman's foundational experience of God's healing and change in Keswick, UK, was outlined by one of the international Elders of *IofC*;
- The present National Coordination Group was wholeheartedly endorsed to continue their valuable work until June 2007, with the addition (with acclamation) of Ruth Vertigan to represent Western Australia.

Talbingo was just as peaceful when we left. But we had no doubt something fresh is stirring across our region.

- Mike Brown, Adelaide

Communications creativity needed

As decided at the recent National Gathering in Talbingo, Initiatives of Change (Australia) has decided to create a new part time position of Communications Officer (voluntary or remunerated). Tasks would include editing *Newsbriefs*, improving and overseeing the Australian website, developing the database, and raising Initiatives of Change's profile with Australia media. Imagination and creativity will be needed along with an enthusiasm to engage with people.

Anyone interested should contact Andrew Lancaster of the National Coordination Group andrew.lancaster@au.iofc.org

What in the world's happening?

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With thanks from Bougainville

After ten years of crisis and negotiations culminating in the historic Bougainville Peace Agreement in 2001, the Autonomous Region of Bougainville was established on the 14 June. Joseph Kabui was sworn in as President. Hosted by Prime Minister Somare, guests included government ministers, members of the diplomatic corps and the UN Observer Mission, Bougainville. Alan Weeks was part of the celebrations, representing *Initiatives of Change* (Australia), as a guest of the Papua New Guinea Government. PNG's Vice President, Joseph Watawi, personally thanked Alan "for all that you (MRA) did for us".

Sierra Leone police, military go through moral training

"Have you felt that this is the moment for a change in the life of a country?" Kofi Bassaw, a young Ghanaian graduate of the last *Action for Life* program in Asia, felt this when faced with the assembly of many senior officers of Sierra Leone's police and military. In September Kofi was one of the facilitators for a training program, aimed at "Moral Foundations for Democracy" (MFD).

As the last of the 17,000 UN peacekeepers prepare to leave Sierra Leone, *IofC* was invited to bring a course that could be replicated within the country's police and army. Two groups of 36 potential trainers went through MFD courses in January. This recent program was for senior officers, including the Chief of Defence Staff and Assistant Inspector of Police, as well as two Paramount Chiefs, the head of the Teachers' Union and director of the Inter-Religious Council.

Clean Africa Campaign

Later this month Kofi Bassaw and a team will welcome 30 Africans for a third "Clean Africa Campaign Leadership Training Program". From 13 West African countries, they come with the aim of "encouraging and training leaders throughout Africa by... using the extensive network of Africans committed to moral and spiritual change". A member

of the faculty who is fighting corruption in the pharmaceutical industry in Nigeria writes, "I am leaving all that I have to do to attend this gathering; I have hope that it will make the difference."

Action starts in India

A third *Action for Life* starts in India on 1 November – see the two page update, enclosed with this *NEWSBRIEFS*. Coordinated by a hard-working group of *Action for Life* graduates in Australia, this program will reach out to countries around Asia and Africa over the next nine months, aiming "to mobilise a new generation of change makers equipped with integrity and faith..."

Miraculously, US \$183,000 has already been raised, thanks to generous giving from individuals and *Initiatives of Change* bodies around the world. Clara Cheong and friends organised a jazz concert in Melbourne collecting more than \$3000. Several participants from Cambodia and Indonesia urgently need support to pay their airfares to India and the US\$2,600 for them to be able to participate in *Action for Life*. (We can suggest specific participants to whom contributions may be directed.) To make a donation contact afl@iofc.org

... and already going in USA

Spinning off two previous *Action for Life* programs, American Will Jenkins meticulously organised a three month *Action (for a change)* in the USA. They started in September with 10 participants from six countries.

At a session for students of American University in Washington, DC, they abandoned their prepared presentation and shared instead what they are learning from their initial difficulties in intercultural communication. This set the stage for some honest conversations with students. In Washington the *Action team* met politicians from both Democrat and Republican parties, joined a conflict resolution workshop and met citizens with the question they are asking everyone: "What kind of America do I want?"

From Washington they headed north on a nationwide tour. They can be tracked on www.action.iofc.org

Muslims 'discover the other'

The Islamic Council of Victoria asked for a *Discover the Other (DTO)* workshop after one of the council members saw a *DTO* presentation in Armagh. Around 40 attended, in a room over the City Mosque in Melbourne.

Over the course of three hours, the workshop unpacked four "keys to relationships": stepping out of your comfort-zone; listening; focussing on "what is right" not "who is right"; and starting with yourself. On returning home that evening, the person who had invited *DTO* emailed her thanks, adding that "feedback was overwhelmingly positive... It was fun, entertaining, yet inspiring and so meaningful." A few days later, one of the three Imams who came wrote: "I'm impressed with the principle and delivery of your program. *Discover the Other* deals with diversity in an intelligent way." Several of the Islamic Council of Victoria expressed hope that there would be further such events.

It only takes a phone call.

On September 14, the *Wanganui Midweek* newspaper (Wanganui is in New Zealand's North Island) carried an article headed, "Change the world, starting with yourself". It developed from a phone call made by local resident Dawn Garner saying she had some thoughts which could help Wanganui people. The article is all about Dawn's discovery of *Initiatives of Change* 17 years ago. "As you change, the people around you change. It was a wonderful discovery because that is exactly what happened." The article includes a diagram with four points giving the progression of change from: change yourself, engage others, create answers, give hope for humanity.

Book Talk

Extra copies of the colourful, stimulating report of the

Together Making a difference

conference in Brisbane in July are available from your local *Initiatives of Change* representative or Grosvenor Books, address below; Or phone (03) 98221218

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