

Indonesia hosts Asia Pacific Youth Conference

Nearly 200 people from 30 countries attended the 12th Asia Pacific Youth Conference in Indonesia, 21-30 July. Barbara Lawler was one of the Australians who took part. She reports:

It was a miracle that the conference was held at all, having originally been located in Yogyakarta, the cultural capital of Java where the tragic earthquake occurred only a few weeks earlier. It took place in Cipanas, near Puncak in the hills near Jakarta and was the first international Initiatives of Change conference to be held in Indonesia.

Indonesia's Deputy Minister for Youth and Sport opened the conference, his Department being one of the sponsors: "I would like to express my appreciation for IofC with its emphasis on the role of the individual in bringing about peace and social justice, through change in motivation, attitudes and relationships."

Lily Munir, who runs an NGO in Jakarta and was instrumental in the first piece of Indonesian legislation to criminalise domestic violence, gave a

plenary speech on "Islam and Universal Peace", emphasising that the word "Islam" means "peace" and "complete surrender to the will of God". The young participants responded to her vision. At the last session of the conference she shared her decision from the platform to be less busy so that she could give more time to her family.

Quality outcomes

Another decision which she had already put into action in Jakarta through the week was to practise quiet times not only for herself but in the many meetings she leads as part of her work, because the quiet time brings quality to the outcomes.

Rozy Munir (no relative), a Vice-Chair of the Nahdatul Ulama (NU), the biggest Muslim organisation in the world with approximately 50 million members, gave

a speech on "Diversity: a source of strength or conflict?". He spoke about the unity that has developed in Indonesia which has led to the two biggest Muslim organisations, NU and Muhammadiyah, promoting a secular State, not an Islamic State.

Habib Chirzin, Human Rights Commissioner, spoke on "Human Security and Social Justice". His varied experience included working in Aceh after the tsunami. "Human security is to secure everyone's well-being, survival and freedom," he said.

The program each day commenced with 7 am Quiet Time for everyone – either all together or in groups.

Our field trip was to Bandung where we met the Governor. We visited the Asian-African Museum, and a memorial park where trees have been planted for every country, not just Asian and African. Indonesia has played a visionary part in world events, in uniting and reconciling divergent parties, bigger than has been realised. I believe this role is going to increase in a world which needs it.



Action for Armagh reminder ...

As Armagh's 50th anniversary celebration approaches, Clara Cheong sends this word from Malaysia:

On 1 November 2005 "Action for Armagh" was launched - a year-long brainstorm in search for inspiration on Armagh, the Initiatives of Change Australian Pacific Centre. This is an opportunity to contribute your ideas towards a new vision, or practical ideas for the centre, or to simply share your experiences of Armagh.

The brainstorm is open to anyone who has visited, lived in or experienced events at Armagh. All ideas are welcome. A report will be put together after the closing date for contributions, which is on 1 November 2006. An information sheet, with some reflection questions was sent out in a previous *Newsbriefs*; however if you would like another copy or more information please email clara.cheong@iofc.org

There's nothing like being with many positive young people for inspiration and hope for the future. Scott Birse, from Brisbane, was one of them. Barbara Lawler asked him about the experience:

How did you feel about going to Indonesia – with the news of disasters etc?

I was very nervous – and when I arrived in Jakarta, I found people friendlier than in Australia. I had some culture shock.

So why did you go to the APYC?

I was interested in meeting other people and hearing different opinions on world issues. I was intrigued to see what the APYC was like.

What was the best experience you had while you were there?

I made so many good friends. I arrived on my birthday and when I jumped off the bus after midnight at the conference venue, everyone sang "Happy Birthday" to me.

What did you think about APYC

and the people you met?

It was the whole culture of people wanting to learn from each other and accepting each other's beliefs no matter what. It was like a family of many people from different countries. The young people from Cambodia and Vietnam were holding regular dialogues to break down the hatred between their countries. There was a good spirit there which is hard to describe.

What do you think about APYC in the future?

We need to get more people involved. I have told a few people what I did and am inviting some to the next IofC conference in Melbourne. I met the Fijian delegates who invited me to attend the conference in Fiji in November which I am planning to do.

'Timely' Fiji Conference for the South Pacific

"Can Fiji and the South Pacific surprise the World?" asks the handsome invitation to the Initiatives of Change conference at the University of the South Pacific, 17-21 November 2006. Copies of the invitation are available from Jim and Rita Coulter (Melbourne, Tel 03 9882 6122) who spent three weeks in Fiji in July.

The invitation's challenge to "heal past wrongs through honesty and forgiveness, transforming our historical differences into a deeper care", resonated with those they met including some of the leading players in Fiji's newly-elected multi-ethnic government. The timeliness of the conference was a recurring note, remarked upon by Churchmen, NGOs, academics, police and politicians. Ratu Meli Vesikula who called the conference has himself played a healing role in Fiji.

In a country where 65% are 25 or younger, those planning the conference in Suva include four who participated in the Asia Pacific Youth Conference in Indonesia in July. They reported back what it had meant to them at a gathering attended by the Vice-President of Fiji. Two were sponsored by a generous friend

in Queensland, and two reflecting Fiji's racial diversity were sent from the Ministry of National Reconciliation on government funding. The Ministry features the conference in its 2006 programme. A young Indo-Fijian printer is building a Fiji IofC website.

In the Solomon Islands the Fiji invitation has drawn a response from members of the Government, Judiciary, Banking and Media. Business and community leader Matthew Wale and Director of the Solomon Islands Christian Association Commission, Judith Fangalasu'u, expect to attend. Joseph Wong, forestry and agricultural investor, will contribute to the key discussion on growing a sustainable rural economy in the Pacific region.

Kiwis Garfield and Helen Hayes have



Three of the conference preparation team who also participated in the APYC in Indonesia

followed the Coulters in Suva, while Peter and Glenys Wood take a brief respite in NZ. Fiji friends will welcome an enlarging support team in October and November.

Those who wish to avail themselves of Early Bird registrations (by 15 September), can contact Tom Ramsay, <tomram@optusnet.com.au>, to arrange transmission to Fiji.

Peter Wood and Jim Coulter

Caux 2006

Forty years ago it appeared that Mountain House, the Initiatives of Change conference centre in Caux, Switzerland, might be about to close. This year it celebrated "60 years of creating peace" with a 60th series of summer conferences under the slogan "Globalising integrity - personalising integrity".

Media interest

Official guests at the opening weekend in July included the Swiss Federal Chancellor as well as the local MP and Mayor of Montreux. Senior officials from the World Trade Organisation, the United Nations, and the Caux Round Table (international business figures) spoke on the conference theme.

Swiss media noted the anniversary by interviewing a Norwegian who had come to Caux as a young man in 1946 and worked with it ever since.

In 2006 Caux once more brought together people from every continent for six weeks of intensive exchanges. Some 30 Australians took part in the sessions or helped to staff the conference. Here are a few highlights - largely courtesy of Andrew Stallybrass's informal newsletters.

The East European team who have

organised the *Service, Responsibility, Leadership* session in previous years were joined in 2006 by a group from the Asia-based *Action for Life* training program and another group from the Latin-American *Gente que Avanza*. The conference was voted the best so far in this series.

The *Tools for Change* session approached in a contemporary way the "HOW" of the Initiatives of Change vision of living to change our world. It attracted 300 participants and was assisted by qualified experts in fields like conflict transformation and healing history. The session will be repeated and further developed in 2007 and 2008. A highlight was a morning on silence and listening led by two Arabs - a Muslim and a Christian.

Arts and communications

The final evening of a rich and intense Renewal Arts Forum featured a "multi-media event" entitled *Absolutely!* and containing a new composition by German saxophonist-composer Uwe Steinmetz inspired by the four standards of IofC: purity, honesty, unselfishness and love. The "event" was given a second performance in the next session: *Trust and Integrity in the Global Economy*. Speaking at this session Bill Porter, founding president of the International

Communications Forum, talked of the "difference between cultivating contacts and caring for people. You never retire from an inner conviction", he said.

The final, 10-day, session was an *Honest Dialogue for a Clean and Just Africa*. It began with an address from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and brought together Africans on the front-line of peace building from around the continent including areas of particular suffering: Sierra Leone, Sudan, Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo, Zimbabwe and others. A UN special representative said: "We must build a solid rampart of values against mafia networks."

For the third year running a Global Indigenous Dialogue ran parallel.

During much of the conference the Israeli-Hezbollah war was taking place, to the distress particularly of Lebanese delegates unable to return home. At the annual meeting of the International Association of Initiatives of Change its outgoing President, Cornelio Sommaruga, was supported in calling for a ceasefire on all sides. "Initiatives of Change - International... stands in solidarity with those on all sides who, in spite of everything, reject the escalation of fear and hatred and seek solutions through dialogue," said the statement.

Peter Thwaites

British Imam to visit Australia

The bridgebuilding Imam of the Brighton Islamic Mission" is journalist Mary Lean's description of Imam Dr Abduljalil Sajid, who will be visiting Australia with his wife in October / November.

Imam Sajid's life does indeed span many divides: from a simple family in a remote Pakistani village where he was born in 1947 to a doctorate from Pakistan's International Islamic University; between West and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), from Asia to Europe where he now lives. From his father, a devout Sufi, he learned a quest for knowledge and openness to the good in all people.

At a time when extremism and violence threaten the world with a vicious circle of polarisation, leaders like Sajid who combine religious devotion with intelligent open-mindedness, have important things to say and experiences to share.

This is why the Initiatives of Change team in Australia have invited him to visit this country, where he will be available to meet policy-makers, people in education, religious leaders and ordinary Australians of every background. The Sajids haven't visited Australia previously and are interested to learn from the experiences of this country and to understand its situation. Friends from Australia's Muslim communities are also keen to meet them and are helping to plan the visit.

Turning point

Imam Sajid spent the first half of his life in Pakistan where he taught Philosophy at two universities. In 1974 he went to Britain to study at the London School of Economics but found British manners cold and disagreeable. After some months of "hell" he made the acquaintance of a Christian clergyman whose genuine faith and hospitable friendship were a turning point for Sajid. He discovered that "not all British were selfish, greedy, immoral... all the things that had come to my mind during the previous three months". It was a powerful experience which demonstrated for him the bond between people of true faith, even if the faiths they belong to are different. Since then he has wanted to build bridges between religious and cultural communities.

He became a leader (Imam) in 1976 of

the Islamic community in Brighton where he and his wife settled in 1979, and has since helped found many bodies that assist minority groups or promote understanding between groups. Particularly since the world terrorism crisis precipitated by 11 September 2001 he has continued his work also at the national and international levels, being called on to advise the UK Government, serving on a commission on

The Sajids' dates in Australia are:

Perth 6-11 October; Adelaide 11-15 October; Gold Coast / Brisbane 15-20 October; Sydney 20-29 October; Canberra 29 Oct-3 Nov; Wagga Wagga 3-5 November; Melbourne 5-11 November. They will also visit **New Zealand 11-16 November** and **Fiji 16-21 November.** Enquiries: Tel (02) 9909 8188; Email <prthwaites@gmail.com>

Website: www.imamsajid.com

Booklet *Why Terror? Is there no alternative?*

Price: \$4. Available from Grosvenor Books, Tel (03) 98221218; Email <armaghoffice@dodo.com.au>

Articles by or about Imam Sajid in *For A Change* magazine: April/May 2002 and June/July 2004 (www.forachange.co.uk)

Islamophobia, meeting the Queen and attending meetings of religious leaders with the heads of the European Union. In December 2001 he was one of 150 participants at the First Summit of World Muslim Leaders in Jakarta which ended with a pledge "to be courageous defenders of peaceful teachings and interpretation of Islam".

In 2004 he edited a booklet *Why Terror: Is there no alternative?* in which 19 prominent Muslims from 12 countries strongly reject the distorted view of Islam propagated by the 11 September terrorists. The booklet is aimed to educate non-Muslims as much as Muslims.

A friend comments on the "shining courage" of Imam Sajid as he has taken the risk of reaching out to other communities across barriers of distrust and prejudice. This has included facing criticism and some active opposition from within his own community.

In an essay published in 2004, "Islam and the middle way", he insists that Islam in its true essence is a teaching of peace, moderation and pluralism. But he distinguishes between "Islam" the faith, and "Muslims" who are free to be good or bad representatives of their faith. The same can obviously be said of other faiths

and philosophies.

In a central paragraph of the essay Sajid writes: "... We should not allow extremists to hijack Islam or any other religion. It is vitally important to refute those shallow secularists who regard religion itself as inevitably divisive, and to rediscover the ethical principles upon which all the great spiritual traditions are based. It is not simply a matter of respecting religious differences; we have to recover the practical spiritual wisdom which unites us and makes us human."

Nowadays Imam Sajid teaches a course at London University "Islam and the Modern World". His local work in Brighton includes serving as a JP and as a Muslim Chaplain to two hospitals and a prison. From 1995 he was the founding Chair of the Brighton and Hove Interfaith Contact Group.

Nationally he is Chairman of the Muslim Council for Religious and Racial Harmony (UK) and of the National Association of British Pakistanis, and Secretary of the Central Board of Ulama (Islamic Scholars and Jurists) UK. He is active on the Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia.

Internationally, he is an Advisory Board member of Initiatives of Change's "Agenda for Reconciliation" program, International Secretary of the World Congress of Faiths, and UK Chair and European Board member of the World Conference on Religion and Peace. In August he attended a world meeting of the WCRP in Japan.

Mrs Jamila Sajid is an interpreter and marriage counsellor. The Sajids have five adult children. *Peter Thwaites*

Towards a cohesive Australia

"How can all communities contribute to a more cohesive Australia?" is the question posed at the next Public Forum to be held in Sydney on 15 September 2006, at 7.30pm.

Four speakers will address the topic:

- The Hon Tony Abbott MP, Federal Minister for Health and Ageing,
- Sheikh Taj Din Al Hilaly, Mufti of Australia,
- Cardinal Edward Cassidy, former President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the

Continued on page 4 ➤

Sydney Peace Circle celebration

On a Sunday in August a colourful crowd of Sydney women gathered in the Belmore Community Centre near Lakemba. Their countries of origin included Kenya, Rwanda, Burundi, Lebanon, Iraq, India, Britain, and Laos. There was a festive atmosphere with helium balloons and a large cake decorated with a dove.

It was the first annual celebration of *Creators of Peace* circles. Ten "peace circles" have taken place in Sydney in the last year. They offer opportunities for women from different backgrounds to

meet and share in small groups and to "explore their peace-making potential", starting with their own lives. Several women told what they had learned during the weeks in their "circle".



Pari Sanyü with high-school students in Sydney

The guest speaker was Pari Sanyü from Nagaland (NE India) and Melbourne (see left). Pari divided us into six groups and gave us this question: "We all have to deal with situations of conflict, grief or loss. What are the sources of inspiration that have helped or are helping you to gain inner strength and clarity?" It was hard to stop talking (and listening) to each other! Women signed up for a Peace Circle facilitators' training workshop to be held in September.

Canterbury Council made the room available free of charge. One of the Council staff commented about the function: "It warms the heart."

Pari also addressed 60 teenagers at the Public Speaking Club of North Sydney Boys and Girls High Schools. She introduced the students to Nagaland and shared some of her insights about her family's ten year struggle to establish themselves in Australia after being compelled to leave NE India because of the violent situation. A week later the students were asked what they remembered of her talk. Many hands shot up. A year 8 girl said: "It was highly inspirational - a wake up call to how lucky we are and how many people need our support." *Rosemary Thwaites*

➤ Continued from page 3

Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, and

- Ms Nadia Jamal, journalist and author.

The forum will be held at the Dooleys Lidcombe Catholic Club, Lidcombe, which is donating refreshments.

It is jointly sponsored by the Catholic Diocese of Parramatta, the Islamic Friendship Association, Initiatives of Change, Halal Helpline and Australian Islamic Educational Trust.

Further information: David Mills, 0402 964 662

Stories that transform us

Story telling is transformative. It allows us to enter into many different levels of reality - almost even parallel realities. As we move with understanding and awareness across these realities we are able to become bridge builders, peace builders.

In college I had a friend by the name of Mondakini, a young Assamese girl. One day while we were in college she got a summons that her mother was in hospital. On the way, Mondakini told me how she had left home that morning without saying goodbye because of a tiff with her mum. By the time we got to hospital - her mother was dead - run over by a bus. Mondakini was 17 years old - quite alone except for her brother. Her father had died years earlier.

Time moved on. About a year later,

we went out with a group of friends. I had just bought a new pair of shoes. In the manner of all teenagers, I had spent many nights dreaming of just how perfect I would look in these shoes, and just how well they would go with my outfit. Imagine my dismay, then, when I discovered that someone had stolen my shoes from the car. I was bereft and bemoaned the loss of my shoes.

While I was carrying on, Mondakini turned to me and said, "Pari, you have lost your shoes. I have lost my mother. I will never see her again."

I am grateful for my friend Mondakini. Her quiet comment was a very deep sharing of her pain which changed the way I regard material possessions.

This is an extract from Pari Sanyü's address to the *Creators of Peace*

Book talk

In the heady days of the late '60s I was in my late teens. Student unrest, drugs, the Pill, an explosion of rock music, free love, feminism, miniskirts, the Vietnam War were sweeping away previously accepted "norms". Into this hothouse of confusion and rebellion came a slim volume called *Freewoman* by Claire Evans, a Frenchwoman with a classics degree from the Sorbonne, married to an Englishman, with a young son. She had been diagnosed with inoperable cancer but managed to complete the book shortly before she died.

There is not a scrap of self pity in this remarkable book. Instead it is full of down-to-earth truth which held my attention in the midst of the social

whirlwind. "When a human being is 5% self-centred, he is ineffective; at 15% he is unhappy; at 85% he is locked up in a psychiatric ward. And they want to make us believe that to be totally self-centred, and do what we like when we like, would be a huge advance for mankind."

Even today her words challenge me with her vision for homemaking: "The open door, not only for the family, but for the neighbourhood and the whole world. The welcome, which is costly because your plans and your comfort are constantly disturbed, but which mean that the person nearest you or the stranger can come in at any time, lay down his burden and find the strength and the vision to continue."

Jane Mills

Freewoman is available from Grosvenor Books c/o Armagh office, Tel (03) 9822 1218