

## 48 hours in Jakarta

**Ron Lawler visited Indonesia on his way to the Initiatives of Change Global Consultation in UK (see p 3). He writes:**

The terrible bomb blast in Bali happened whilst I was in Kuala Lumpur en route to Jakarta.

Students of the Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University had invited me to present workshops to students and staff of their University and to address an Islamic Boarding School in Jakarta. Several of the inviting group are leaders of significant student bodies. They want to work with the ideas of MRA-IC in their country, and have begun to implement changes in their own lives.

The news of the bomb did not reach me until I arrived at Jakarta the following day. The day after I left Jakarta the Australian Government was asking Australians to leave Indonesia.

At many events I was asked what I felt about the blast and the sad loss of so many Australians. A member of the MPR (Indonesian Parliament) who received me as Chairman of the Islamic Boarding School immediately offered his apologies for what had happened in Bali.

I was interviewed and photographed by a journalist from *Post Kota*, a national daily newspaper. In response to his question on the bombing I included the story of Dr Yusuf Al-Azhari of Somalia, whose practice of his faith led him to forgive the former President of his country whose regime had jailed him for six years, where he suffered torture. Dr Al-Azhari is still battling for the reconciliation of his country.

Indonesia is currently preparing anti-terrorist legislation and no doubt these events will push that along. I shared my view at every opportunity that terrorism is first born in the hearts of people and it is there that it must be resolved. We must quench the fires of hatred in our hearts and the greed and fear that inflames that hatred.

At two workshops in different departments of the university I gave

presentations entitled, "Credible People Make Sane Nations and a Sane World". 200 were present at one workshop and 60 at the other. The content included references from the Qu'ran relating to God's commission to change the nation and the light of guidance that He provides us with to do that. There were a number of stories of change in people's lives. Lively discussions followed indicating a tremendous interest in and openness to the ideas of MRA-Initiatives of Change

One evening I met with 40 members of a Muslim student association. Their questions ranged across issues such as Iraq and Australia's foreign policies. One student queried the idealism of the MRA-IC approach. I answered that idealism was about things that had not yet happened, but what we were discussing here were practical experiences of change, of which we need more.

I had the honour of addressing the student body and staff in the Mosques at each of two campuses of an Islamic Boarding School. The first campus is

### Issue number

Did you notice that the last *Newsbriefs* (September) was numbered 186, and the one before that (August) was 184? Probably not - because we only recently noticed that we omitted to advance the number last December. Even after 8 issues we feel it is worth making the correction. It leaves us with two 177s and no 185.

Apologies, *Editors*

important for the training of religious leaders - Ulamas. The Principal asked me please to come back and said, "We need moral development. How do we take part in MRA?" After speaking at the first campus he insisted that I visit their sister campus before racing for my flight. Staff members there assailed me with words of thanks and encouragement to return to their school.

The students who invited me to Indonesia are now planning their future activities to engage their country, to develop their teamwork, to deepen their commitment and understanding. Despite the current tensions we must keep a Godly readiness to assist in whatever way we can along with our colleagues from other lands.

*Ron Lawler, who speaks Indonesian, is a civil servant with ATSIC and a member of the Australian MRA-IC Council of Management.*

## Apology from Indonesian students

**The following message came from the young Indonesians who were at the Asia Pacific Youth Conference in Malaysia in July 2002, and some of their friends:**

Dear friends of World,

In the name of the team of MRA Indonesia, we are very sorry for the tragedy in Bali. It's a tragedy against human rights. We fully hope that the family victims may be blessed a strong heart by God. Amen.

What has happened in Bali is obviously against the moral values of Indonesia, values of Islam, values of all religions. The prophet of Islam says: 'You don't have a complete faith until you love your neighbour as you love yourself.'

We, Indonesians, condemn this terrorist action and suggest to the bomber, to realize that you are also a human, created by the love of God to live with love. Your action burnt the hope of world: love. We beg you to realize and ask forgiveness from the family victims that you hurt. We won't be able to live together without loving each other. This will be the way of peace for all races, nations and religions.

We are very sorry,

The Indonesian teamwork  
*Bahrul, Baidowi, Dadaan, Ilyas, Suheri, Caroline*

# The language of simple, caring actions

"A community of communities" is the vision of multicultural Australia. But achieving that vision often starts with one individual and one community. Peter Thwaites reports:

The graceful roof of *Wat Phrayortkeo* (the "Temple of the Emerald Buddha") rises up on its high pedestal in Edensor Park, in Sydney's outer south-west. The temple is a spiritual and cultural heart for Sydney's Laotian community.

Chanthanith and Ramphay Chittasy were refugees from Laos after the 1975 coup and now run an electronics repair business on the North Shore. Their three children are Australian-born. Every Sunday the Chittasys travel an hour across Sydney to give their services at the temple. Ramphay serves as Assistant Public Officer and Chanthanith (known to his friends as Nith) as Project Coordinator with the Lao Buddhist Society of NSW, which runs the temple and its activities.

## Campaign Cafe Forum

On 16 October the University of New South Wales Community Aid Abroad group (UniCAA) organised a Campaign Cafe Forum on the theme *Australia's Role in Fighting Poverty: Overseas and Locally*. Three speakers were invited to address the student audience: Adrian Kinslor, fund raiser for CAA, Clarence Slockee, Aboriginal worker on Indigenous issues for St Vincent de Paul and Peter Thwaites from Initiatives of Change, whose topic was *Breaking Barriers and Changing Attitudes - the spiritual and human factors in combating poverty*.

Leaflets advertising the speakers were widely distributed through the university. The two-hour event included some lively exchanges on practical and philosophical themes. Clarence Slockee supported Peter Thwaites' emphasis on the "spiritual factor which is the most precious core of our humanity and is our best guide to finding solutions. There are vicious circles that we have to break and virtuous circles that we have to encourage."

One of the organisers emailed afterwards: "We had an excellent response from the audience who all agreed that it was a very valuable, inspiring and insightful evening."

They also work with the Young Lao Advancement Group (YLAG).

During the 1990s the Chittasys were busy with small children. They also managed to take part in several Asia Pacific Youth Conferences with MRA-Initiatives of Change in India, The Philippines and Japan.

In 1999 they were Buddhist representatives at an interfaith conference *Life, Faith, Fellowship* in Caux, Switzerland. In the same year a young man in the Australian Lao community had seen a film "Smile of the Apsara" which inspired him with the vision of a responsible group of young Laotians. He talked with the Chittasys and the group began to form. In December some of its members attended the International MRA-IC conference *Sharing our Hope* in Sydney, on the day when the subject was *Building Community*.

Out of those experiences came the creation in 2000 of YLAG, catering for Lao people aged 15-40. This led to new directions for Nith and Ramphay. "Having been involved in a world-wide community we wanted to give something back to our national community," explains Nith. Ramphay adds: "When your heart has stretched out to the world community it can never shrink!" Saturdays were still for the family; now Sundays were for the temple and community centre. It began with taking on humble but necessary jobs - cleaning bathrooms and toilets, repairing leaking taps - expressing their thought in the language of simple caring actions.

## Historical legacy

Historical experiences can leave a legacy of fear and suspicion in refugee communities. The regime from which many fled is still in power in Laos today. Nith himself came to Australia in 1976 after escaping twice across the guarded Lao-Thai frontier. It takes time to win people's trust. The Chittasys discovered it meant learning humbly all the way.

"It means going just to give," says Nith. "You try to have a pure intention, accepting people as they are, having an effect on the basis of actions without expecting anything back. If people are unfriendly to us we don't have to close our hearts - that would mean losing our original good intention. This is where the training with MRA-IC taught us to see the bigger picture. We try not to be fussed

by little things so as to keep our purpose and vision clear. "We are helped by the phrase 'a

greed-free, fear-free, hate-free community'," he says. "If we act without wanting money or power it flows."

The Chittasys' great passion is to instil the virtues in the next generation and plant the seeds of positive thinking. In August 2001 a Sunday School was started where children are taught the Buddhist precepts, chants, meditation, self-care and self-discipline. They learn that Mara, the spirit of evil, is trying every second to keep people's thoughts busy and confused. Mara does not like people to meditate or seek stillness. The Bodhi tree under which the Buddha found enlightenment is used as a symbol for environmental responsibility.

## Old fears wiped being out

Besides this the Chittasys have the unofficial portfolio of relations with the wider society. Combined events have been initiated with the Vietnamese, Cambodian and other Buddhist communities. People from many national and religious backgrounds worked together at a project in Nambucca Heads supporting the local Aboriginal community.

It was in December 2000 at the Nambucca Heads project, where Nith had been sent by the temple, that he made friends with a leadership trainer. In March 2002, the trainer, who normally charges a high fee, gave his services at a weekend course at Jervis Bay for young Laotians - with others from Vietnam and Cambodia. "Thirty three young delegates came together for an intensive course on personal leadership... The youth of different backgrounds had the chance to share their deepest experiences and learn about trust, giving service and expecting nothing in return," says the report. Many others helped, including the Abbot of the temple.

There has been an increase in multicultural and interfaith events. "People are getting to know each other more and more," says Nith. "Old fears are slowly being wiped out."

The 2001-2002 illustrated report of Lao Buddhist Society of NSW Inc., *Reaching out to the community*, refers to these and other stories. "The more we give, the more we diminish barriers in our community, the less we feel isolated," write Nith and Ramphay in the foreword.

They continue to repair leaking taps.

# In Cambodia

## Farmers' Dialogue project

**Phil Jefferys, a farmer from NSW, was asked to visit Cambodia for two weeks in August to help prepare for a Farmers' Dialogue.**

This is a program of MRA-IC encouraging exchange between farmers around the world. Phil's host, HE Son Soubert, member of the Constitutional Council of Cambodia, and other colleagues want to offer a positive approach to the enormous range of problems confronting the rural people of Cambodia. This approach includes dealing with corruption as well as providing a framework of sustainable land use and land tenure.

(Report available from [pmjeff@mail.bigpond.com](mailto:pmjeff@mail.bigpond.com))

## Student groups ending the verbal war

**15 young Cambodians who came to the Asia Pacific Youth Conference in July have been running workshops for young people, using themes from the APYC.**

The five who came from Battam-

bong have enlisted 12 of their classmates and spent two weeks "learning about Initiatives of Change, MRA's guidelines and how to listen to the inner voice". In September they held a one-day workshop for 64 fellow students, and report that after a time of quiet "most of them wanted to share... We were proud to see them come up to share apologies, deciding to change their habits, to get rid of selfishness... to be better people... The class community, recently broken into

pieces by verbal war, has now recovered through these words of apology and forgiveness."

The Phnom Penh group have conducted a four-hour workshop for 40 young people from high schools, universities and NGOs. They meet every two weeks at the Khmer Youth Association to "know each other more clearly... and to forge friendships and understanding amongst colleges" using a "4-point strategy: absolute honesty, purity, unselfishness, love".

## PNG workshop

**Developing Meaning for Life was the name the participants gave to a nine-day workshop at Gamadoudou, Milne Bay, Papua New Guinea, 14-23 October. Sandra Aneluwo reports:**

The workshop was facilitated by Alan and Liz Weeks from Melbourne.

16 participants attended the workshop. So much was learned within a short time. It was very challenging and refreshing, and everyone made fresh commitments as they returned to their homes.

Janet Gaileko, the hostess of the Gamadoudou home, said about the Inner Reflection / Sharing session:

**a** - It has helped me to be thankful.

**b** - It has convicted me to say sorry.

**c** - It has humbled me to change.

**d** - It has encouraged me to think of others.

**e** - It has reminded me to build relationships.

**f** - It has enlightened me to look to God.

**g** - It has challenged me to look in my life.

**h** - It has opened my heart to care for the world."

Developing meaning for life was what the participants felt the workshop did for their lives.

A planning ahead meeting is scheduled for 11 November to discuss a pilot workshop in 2003 under the theme *Developing Meaning for Life*.

## 'If you have a big heart and a big conviction, you have to learn a big lot!'

**The above words of the late Bill Jaeger were quoted by one of the 38 people from 21 countries who took part in the Initiatives of Change Global Consultation, held in UK 17 - 24 October 2002.**

During the week of discussion on IC's broad strategic directions, the phrases "reaching out", "understanding" and "true partnership" emerged repeatedly. We quote from a 9-page report of the session:

"We experienced afresh that the life and values we share in Initiatives of Change are more important than our differences. Yet we all recognize the need to learn more about the other.

### Conclusions on main items:

- We endorse vigorous dialogues between Muslims and non-Muslims, in a spirit of deliberate inclusion. We support a programme of proposed visits, between Muslim and

non-Muslim countries.

- We will build on a rich history of dialogue between civilizations, including notably two conferences/round tables in Caux last summer specifically involving Muslims. These initiatives will be continued.

- We will build on existing relationships of trust, to intensify conversations involving people of the Middle East and those closely connected to it.

- As a world-wide fellowship, we will reach out to citizens of the USA at all levels and wherever we are.

- We will expand IC's engagement with the United Nations. The IC International Association's responsibility for the IC office at the UN

## Global Consultation report

in New York is a symbol of this commitment."

In pursuit of these directions 19 specific project proposals were elaborated, falling in to three categories: visits, training and events. A second *Action for Life* program, to start in November 2003, was endorsed.

Four people were selected to serve terms on the International IC Council, including Australian Mike Brown from 2004.

Countries represented at the Consultation were: Australia, Canada, Congo, Denmark, Egypt, Fiji, France, Germany, India, Ireland, Japan, Kenya, Lebanon, Malta, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Pakistan, Russia, South Africa, Switzerland, Tunisia, UK and the USA.

## "When forgiveness comes, it is a powerful experience"

**Maria Grace, a Staff Nurse in a hospital in Britain, has recently been in Australia helping on the Life Matters course. She sent this story:**

An 82-year-old patient on our ward, Mr O is ill with cancer and his condition is such that no further medical treatment is beneficial. We are trying to keep him comfortable and well cared for until the end of his life. Nursing him has been difficult. Despite the good care he receives this patient is grumpy, rude and demanding with anyone within range. Nothing is good enough for him. There seems to be a lot of the baggage of bitterness in his past.

His only daughter, a very kind lady who lives in the USA, comes over to be with him. But he makes life difficult for her too. The day his daughter leaves, he will not say goodbye to her, which distresses her a great deal. The nurse looking after Mr O, who has got to know him quite well, has the courage to speak frankly: "You are a horrible

man. How can you treat your daughter like that? Say goodbye to her and tell her you love her." This brings about a more satisfactory farewell.

Next day, while I help Mr O with his wash, he seems more grateful than usual. On the other side of the closed curtain, four patients are receiving Holy Communion and we hear the Lord's Prayer. He stops me to listen to it. Then he says: "You've done a wonderful job. Thank you."

Another day passes and during his wash he suddenly says to me: "It is my daughter's birthday today and I have sent her a card." I am astonished, but his neighbours confirm that they helped him to send it as his hands are very crippled. Later, a colleague tells me with some emotion that Mr O wants to phone America. Amazingly he manages to speak to his daughter in her lunch break at work. He wishes her Happy Birthday and says he loves her. I am told she was in tears and said that was the best birthday present ever.

The staff are busy the next morning

and Mr O gets washed late - something he doesn't like - but he is patient. We talk about the phone call and what a miracle it was that he spoke to her just at the right moment. "It was more than a miracle. I know I am forgiven." His voice is very soft and it takes an effort to understand him. On his request I arrange for him to receive Communion. When I relate the story to the nurse mentioned above, she says: "When forgiveness comes, it is a powerful experience."

I find it a privilege to care for him for the next four days over Easter. His voice is less and less audible and communication becomes more feeble. Sometimes he pushes me away when I want to do something for his care. I say: "It's time to let go, Mr O, just let me care for you." He is sometimes a little confused and once he whispers: "I want to say farewell, because I am going home on Monday." When Easter Monday comes I go off duty and I say goodbye to him.

He dies at ten past seven that evening.

## Setting right the health of nations

by **George C Wilson AM, MB BS, FRACP, FACHAM**

**The treatise *The Wealth of Nations* has influenced economic thought ever since it was written by the Scot, Adam Smith, in 1776. Yet the future will be determined as much by the health of nations.**

Health is our greatest personal possession. Global health must assume priority if the human race is to survive.

Here are some examples of national and international health issues:

- The WHO declared smallpox to be eradicated in 1977. Yet this has not prevented countries from stockpiling the virus for biological warfare.
- There are many thousands of child soldiers in the world, trained and ready for battle.
- Malnutrition, starvation, infectious disease - Hepatitis B & C, HIV/AIDS and STDs abound.
- Obesity, and addictions such as

alcoholism and petrol-sniffing are matters of huge concern in our own country. According to Justice Tony Fitzgerald's Cape York Justice Study, for example: "Unless the epidemic of alcohol abuse is dealt with, no other development, including economic or educational reform, can occur."

The most powerful source of mental, physical and spiritual strength for my wife and myself during our 58 years of marriage has been the way of life offered by the Oxford Group (forerunner of MRA-IC) which fathered the famous 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous.

From the Oxford Group literature of 1936, I quote *When Man Listens* by Cecil Rose: "Surrender (to God) is not simply an initial act. It is a process carried deeper every day. We find out more of ourselves to give to God. We find out more of what God can do with us. But it is possible for us now to give all we know of ourselves to all we know of God. When we hand over, God takes charge and things

begin to happen. A world of strain falls from us. The business of running life is off our hands. We find that we get through more work because it is being ordered better. We meet people we were afraid of, and discover that fear has gone. A habit that always beat us seems to have lost its power. Someone we could not bear appears to us in a new light, and we love them. We come through an ordeal and know that it was not in our own strength."

Over the years, Janet and I have come to live by listening to the inner voice and obeying it. Personal change has provided a moral backbone for our faith. Guidance and Obedience have become the Ying and Yang of our existence.

At least theoretically, the medical profession is caring and politically neutral. By its very nature it is concerned with marshalling forces for good. Decision-making at the highest level is already obsolete unless this power is thoughtfully used to set right the health of nations.

---

All your contributions of items, news, comments are welcome. Next deadline: Wednesday 20 Nov 2002

to **The Editor, NEWSBRIEFS, 151 Kent Street, Hughes, ACT 2605**

fax: (02) 6285 3616 e-mail: johnbond@netspeed.com.au

New subscriptions and address changes: **NEWSBRIEFS, 226 Kooyong Road, Toorak, VIC 3142**

**MRA - Initiatives of Change**  
MORAL RE-ARMAMENT ABN 22 004 350 789