

## Solomon Islanders visit Australia

*As the Pacific intervention force in the Solomon Islands continued its roundup of weapons Matthew Wale, who spoke at the MRA-IC conference in Sydney during April, was in Australia with two colleagues from the Solomons meeting parliamentarians, government and NGO officials, academics and directors of two "watchdog" commissions. Their two-week visit was hosted jointly by MRA - Initiatives of Change and the National Council of Churches in Australia. David Mills reports:*

Almost daily reports on the progress of the Australian-led Pacific intervention force in the Solomon Islands have focused on their efforts to collect the guns used in the violent ethnic conflict – an operation which seems to have been successful and widely welcomed by most local groups. Their mission, known as "Helpem Fren", will also help to re-establish law and order, public administration, and financial and police services as part of the request by the Solomon Islands Government.

### Leadership needed

However, the Solomon Islands Christian Association (SICA) in a recent press release warned: "Whatever the form of intervention by outside parties, the issue of Solomon Island leadership cannot be provided by outsiders. Outside intervention can only be constructive if facilitated by ethical Solomon Island leadership. Our national motto – 'to lead is to serve' – is the object of ridicule as self-service is the general practice. Poor leadership, for which we are all responsible, has brought our nation to its knees."

SICA, the peak body for the Solomon Islands churches, is an important part of the Civil Society Network which played a vital role in negotiations between the warring factions during the conflict. It also provided basic humanitarian support for communities and individuals when government services collapsed.

**Matthew Wale**, who heads the Civil Society Network, came to Australia with **Abraham Baeanisia**, Director of the Solomon Islands Development Trust, and **Eric Takila**,

executive member of SICA and Director of the South Seas Evangelical Church.

The purpose of their visit was, firstly, to express appreciation for the work being done by the intervention forces. Secondly, to share concerns about how to develop the leadership of integrity needed to give the intervention a lasting effect. Thirdly, to build relationships with individuals and organisations who might be able to help this process. And fourthly, to coordinate the work being done by partner NGO bodies in Australia.

In Canberra they became familiar with some of the 22 kilometres of corridors in Parliament House as they met MPs from all parties. One

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## Zimbabweans battling for the life and spirit of their country

*John Bond from Canberra returned recently to Zimbabwe where he had worked for six years with MRA-IC.*

Zimbabwe is facing several crises, but the spirit of its people has not been broken. I was there in July with Professor Cornelius Marivate from South Africa.

Cornelius was a Member of the South African Parliament for four years, having been asked personally by Nelson Mandela to stand for the ANC. As an MP he was always ready to challenge his party's tactics if he felt they were dishonest or divisive. He has been known for his integrity since the time when, as a young teachers' union leader, he admitted to his fellow union officials that he had stolen from the funds; and then

arranged for them to consult with a dozen of his colleagues at an evening reception. Ideas for developing an on-going friendship flowed from that occasion. Another MP took some of their concerns to Question Time in the Senate. Practical steps to assist the needs of the country were discussed.

In expressing their primary need, Matthew spoke of "building a credible indigenous leadership". Can one resist a bribe? He can say from experience that the answer is "yes". He understands the link between systemic corruption and ethnic conflict. And, as he related at the MRA-IC conference in Sydney, he knows only too well the personal pain and risks involved in confronting and forgiving those who have caused so much grief and suffering.

### Challenge of integrity

However, the challenge of integrity and understanding lies as much with "outsiders" who are involved with the Solomon Islands. In its press release SICA makes a plea: "Our international neighbours that want to help us must adequately comprehend the nature of our problems." Certainly corrupt practices of some foreign businesses contribute to the problems, including some from Australia.

SICA called on "all Solomon Islanders to take responsibility for our circumstances. Leaders from communities, organisations and our churches must serve. There is a rich and diverse network that can cooperatively make a difference and offer hope for the future."

returned the money. While fighting tough battles on behalf of his people, he has stood up to death threats, but has sometimes won over his enemies. Today in a poor area near Pretoria there is a large thriving school which would not be there had not Cornelius gone to the white official who was blocking the school's construction, and asked forgiveness for his hatred.

In several meetings while in Zimbabwe, Cornelius and I shared our experience of working for morally-based national policies. We met Government and Opposition leaders. In Harare we spoke to university

**Continued on next page** ^

# Zimbabwe

Continued from previous page

students and lecturers. When we finished, a lecturer came and asked us to keep the following afternoon free. He arrived to pick us up, and soon we found ourselves in the home of a well-known Member of Parliament of the ruling party.

Among the 30 people present were several prominent in the party hierarchy. They listened intently as Cornelius challenged them to build a just society, detailing in story after story what this challenge had meant in his own life.

I told of my work with the *Sorry Day Committee* and of our recent agreement with the Australian government on the wording of a memorial to the stolen generations, acknowledging the removal policies as "cruel and misguided". When I finished, the wife of a cabinet minister said to me: "I know how difficult it is for a government to admit that it has been wrong. What you have told us is a great encouragement to me."

The lecturer was one of many Zimbabweans we met who are battling for the life and spirit of their country – confronting corruption, stemming the onslaught of HIV/AIDS, boosting food production in rural areas. They find inspiration in their contact with people who are similarly active elsewhere in Africa and the world – and they spread news of initiatives such as Kenya's *Clean Election Campaign*. To do this they need equipment which is hard to obtain in Zimbabwe, such as modems, printer refills, photocopying supplies.

*I have decided to raise A\$1,500 for these needs. Anyone who wishes to help can send their contribution to MRA-IC – see address bottom of page 4.*

## Kiwis tackle environment

On 2 October, Mahatma Gandhi's birthday, *Apni Dharati (our earth)*, the brainchild of New Zealand climatologist Alan Porteous, is being launched in Panchgani, western India.

This international environment and culture festival is being supported by countryman Te Rangi Huata and his Kahurangi Maori Dance Theatre. It is a step towards Alan's long worked-for dream of establishing the *Asia Plateau Centre for Environmental Learning* at the MRA-IC centre in Panchgani.

Watch for reports in a coming NEWSBRIEFS, or contact <apnidharati@vsnl.net>



## August highlights

The largest group of **Palestinians and Israelis** ever to be in Caux met daily in closed-door discussions during the week-long session on *Peace-building initiatives*. In his Caux Lecture that week **Professor Sari Nusseibeh**, Palestinian President of the Al-Quds University in Jerusalem, described a growing people's movement for Middle East peace. Many of the UN resolutions and "road-maps" were designed without consulting the peoples on both sides. So with Israel's former Navy General, **Ami Ayalon**, he had started a movement to collect signatures endorsing a proposal for a two-state solution, with clear approaches to the questions of settlements and refugees' right of return, a shared Jerusalem and a special status for the holy sites. In barely one month 60,000 Israelis and Palestinians had signed. Their dream is to take a million signatures to their respective leaders with a plea to "deliver us from 50 years of suffering to a new dimension of sanity".

Twelve from the **Indonesian province of Papua** (formerly Irian Jaya) spoke eloquently - with plaintive songs and stark statistics - of the aggressive deforestation and large-scale transmigration which is changing the land of their ancestors for ever. Indonesians and Papuans together spelt out their commitment to non-violent solutions and asked for the help of the world.

The largest delegations were from Africa: a high level government group from post-civil war **Sierra Leone**, Muslim leader the Emir of Kano from **Nigeria**, the **Zimbabweans**. Military officers, government officials and peacemakers from "the Great Lakes" region – **Congo, Uganda, Burundi and Rwanda** – met for the third time in a year at Caux in a trust-building dialogue. Asked where she got her passion, a field-worker in Rwanda spoke of seeing a mass grave opened up with 50,000 bodies near her home, and said, "I owe it to them, as fellow beings on earth." She could not sustain her work without her prayers which were "Patriot missiles for peacemaking".

At the same time as Nigerian peacekeeping troops were landing in **Liberia**, **Sam Doe** from that country described his anguish over boy soldiers whom he had tried to rehabilitate – only to see six of them commit suicide and others again take up arms. "What went wrong in their personal and social lives that transformed them to such violent human beings?" he asked. He had reached the "painful realisation that personal transformation cannot be sustained in an unnurturing environment". His NGO has formed coalitions among civil society groups in 13 West Africa countries and is engaging in "constructive and critical dialogues" with governments to create capable, accountable states.

A similar point was stressed in the final Caux Lecture of the summer, given by the Director General of the International Committee of the Red Cross, **Angelo Gnaedinger**. "Human security" demands a dual approach of "striving to abolish war itself" linked with "practical measures to alleviate the sufferings of the victims," said Gnaedinger. More than 10,000 Red Cross workers were active in 70 countries where there was armed violence – a sign of the ICRC's vision that "even in the heart of darkness, in the midst of war, a minimum of human security can be preserved." In this session, contributors included three women speaking on the social and economic cost of HIV/AIDS, a Canadian group working for indigenous rights, and a young Japanese who had spoken 180 times across Japan to raise support to clear land-mines in Cambodia.

The growing trend of the world religions working together as "partners for peace and the common good" was the premise of a session looking at "**the spiritual factor in secular society**". An Orthodox Rabbi, a Pakistani Imam and a German Protestant theologian were among those sharing experiences of inter-faith dialogues. Dialogue is needed, said Dr John Taylor who headed the World Council of Churches' inter-religious dialogue office for 10 years, "not simply as a theological response to religious pluralism... but as a call to build a shared peaceful and equitable society... to mobilise commitments for world peace and justice."

# 'They said, "It will change your life"... and it did'

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*Christina de Angelis, a social worker from Adelaide, went to Caux from Oxford where she is employed as a mental health worker. It was her first experience of a Caux conference. In November, Christina joins 30 young people in the nine-month "Action for Life" program in Asia.*

Before I attended the conference, my IC friends had told me so much about Caux: "It's fantastic, it's beautiful, it's intense, it will change your life..." I certainly experienced all of that.

Just being in the beautiful Mountain House over looking Lake Geneva in an atmosphere of peace and beauty was healing.

I felt myself a part of history when I read the story in the Caux Expo, of the sacrifices of the Swiss MRA team to purchase Caux Palace (in 1946) – how they were swept up in the hope that made them cry after the pain and destruction of WWII "Es muss alles anders werden (everything must be different)." Tears came to my eyes when I read how a young woman, whose fiancé had died in the War, had

donated her bridal trousseau to raise funds. They had such hope and faith for a better world in the midst of suffering.

That same hope and faith is what I encountered in my conversations with many people, and listening to speakers. I met so many amazing people from places as far flung as Lithuania, Liberia, Palestine and Nagaland. I was moved to hear their stories of pain and suffering – yet in all of them was this resounding faith, hope and love that forgave enemies and kept going in the midst of terrible trials.

For me personally, God used all this to challenge me to change. After reading how Frank Buchman (the founder of MRA-IC) had felt lead to write and forgive those who had wronged him, I became convicted of the need to look at my own life to see where I needed absolute honesty; and to ask forgiveness for resentments held against others. It led me to write many letters. It was a process full of fear – what will my boss from two years ago think receiving a letter from me stating I was wrong to hold anger

against her for bullying me... and now wishing her joy? Is it safe to write to people who I know I cannot trust?

Yet I felt that if I responded to this challenge it would set me free in a way I did not know. I could see the fruit it had borne in Buchman's life – all around me.

The other challenge I am responding to is the idea of having "quiet time". As a Christian I am very familiar with this term and with prayer; but the new emphasis on just "listening" is one I have not had the courage to respond to before. The best part is experiencing that it works. God does speak to me when I listen, though not always in amazing revelations. For a hyperactive person like me, sitting quietly and listening is really hard. But I know that I cannot even try to build peace in the world unless I build it first in my own life.

My hope for a better world starts with me because I am the only person I can change. From those people around me at Caux, I see that this process is not idealistic but one which really does lead to a better world.

# 'There is something sacred here'

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It was one of those balmy evenings under the trees on the terrace at Caux – the final night of the conference, when we were being rewarded with dancing... Scottish, Australian, Ukrainian, Arabic. I was sitting with a retired General from Jordan, a man engaged in creating understanding between his people and Israel. He had been a signatory of the peace treaty between the two countries. With us were a Rabbi and his wife whose wholehearted dance style enticed an elderly Austrian woman to abandon her crutch and join in.

The Israelis and Palestinians were still slightly tentative around each other but determined to continue building the trust born during the previous days. There had been some deeply painful listening to one another. A young Muslim mother described her daily journey to work in Jerusalem, always having to leave home early to get through the road blocks and checkpoints and then spending all day worrying about whether she and her husband would get home that night and how long it would take. An

Israeli educator spoke of the pain of all mothers on both sides of the conflict. "Don't believe all that you read," she said. "None of us want to see our sons and daughters die." Israeli young men are forced to serve in the army. One of her sons had been in prison five times for refusing to obey orders. Her other son has been deeply traumatised after a bus was blown up in front of him.

They spoke of the mobile telephone culture in Israel and Palestine as people constantly check up on the health and whereabouts of loved ones. One day she had received a call from a Palestinian hospital in desperate need of medicines. It took her 10 days to get two truck loads through. The head of the hospital said to her, "On that day I knew there was another Israel."

Perhaps this is the key to the fear of the "other", the stereotyped "enemy". It is rather to discover "another". The previously unknown humanity of the "neighbour". And this was happening repeatedly at Caux. As one young black Muslim woman suffering from racist abuse

expressed, "Here I have seen another sort of white person".

But what touched me personally, unexpectedly, was a new vision of the continued significance of Caux for this day and age. It was the Senator from the Congo who did it. Founder of the National Women's Union, former Member of Parliament, a victim of imprisonment and torture for her stand for democracy, she spoke of coming out of "40 years in the wilderness" – referring to the lawlessness, atrocities and conflicts which have blighted her country and left four million dead.

Then she simply said, "One of the reasons we have for hope in the world is the existence of the meetings here in Caux. We arrive full of burdens and wounds, close to giving up. But we leave again recharged, strengthened and convinced. There is something sacred here... I am grateful to those who sacrifice for Caux to continue, for the love of tomorrow."

I recommitted myself to that love that day.

– Jean Brown, Adelaide

# Indonesians work for trust between faiths

Barbara Lawler, who works at the ABC in Sydney, is taking time off this month in response to an invitation to help with a week of workshops in Jakarta, Indonesia. Rob Wood from Melbourne will also be taking part. Barbara tells of this courageous venture by Indonesian friends: Two Indonesian representatives at the *Together we can make a world of difference* Sydney conference last April were Bachrul Ilmi, a student at the State Islamic University, and his aunt, Emma Soekarba, a lecturer at the University of Indonesia. At that time they came up with an idea...

Emma and Bachrul have initiated an intensive program 21 - 28 September to "introduce the heart beat of MRA-IC" at a number of institutions including their own universities. As Richard Carleton said, introducing a student forum in Jakarta in a recent *Sixty Minutes* program, "Students in this country do count."

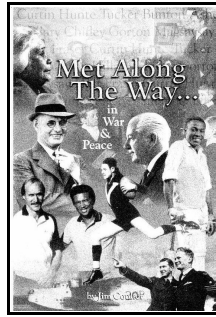
They also plan to reach out to Confucian and Buddhist communities.

Practical and relevant

Emma aims to build bridges across the faiths and "to encourage people to trust each other so that we can work together in a peaceful way". Among the workshop themes are "Making one's faith practical and relevant" and "Cooperation for a change".

They have invited Malaysian, Japanese and Australian participation and teamwork in the program. I am privileged and challenged to be taking part - more than ever convinced that this bridge-building work with our neighbours is key to freeing Australia from "navel-gazing" and to the development of effective partnerships. Indonesia could lead the region in demonstrating reconciliation, encouraging faith and developing communities which care and ensure everyone's needs are met.

*Editors note: Financial contributions towards Barbara's and Rob's participation would be welcome and should be sent to the MRA-IC office in Melbourne, address below.*



## 'How he did it is beyond me'

Just out this month, a new book by Jim Coulter is being made available at special rates for NEWSBRIEFS readers as detailed in the flier accompanying this issue.

Melbourne columnist and author, Martin Flanagan, in his foreword to Jim Coulter's *Met Along the Way - in War and Peace* writes that it covers "fifty years of living in the belief we cannot expect to change the world if we cannot first change ourselves. Frankly, how he succeeded in doing so is beyond me but the evidence of the book is that he did. The result is a person who belies Thoreau's dictum that most men lead lives of quiet desperation and a book that speaks modestly of the place of hope in an uncertain and dangerous world."

The book starts back in Australia's rough-hewn days with the author's pioneering grandfather finding enough gold to buy two farms, being driven off his property by drought, and then being washed out of his Lismore store by flood. The pioneering tradition continued, his father being the first one to show motion pictures in Western Australia. Later the author and his wife were amongst the initiators of Moral Re-Armament in Australia.

"Readable and racy" was the summing up of one reviewer. A series of anecdotes introduces the reader to sportsmen, Prime Ministers, and a load of fascinating characters "met along the way". His WW2 experiences spurred the author to do something about the peace. A seven-year postwar stint in Europe enabled him to participate in initiatives to bring a new spirit between France and Germany. He also gives the background on Japan finding a new relationship with her neighbours and how the White Australia policy came to be rescinded.

## A clear and present danger

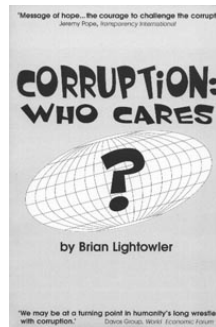
*Transparency International (TI), an NGO with 90 chapters around the world, is committed to fighting corruption. Grahame Leonard, CEO of TI in Australia, reviews Brian Lightowler's recent book "Corruption: Who Cares?"*

Brisbane-based journalist Brian Lightowler cares sufficiently to have written this very readable and informative book which should be required reading for all. A long time campaigner for integrity, Lightowler forcefully argues that corruption is a "clear and present danger (and) ...should be seen as an issue of national security."

He supports this conclusion with a wide range of summarised case studies from across the globe. These are balanced by a summary of responses from government and official organisations (such as The World Bank, NGOs, business and individuals).

He concludes on an optimistic note, arguing that there is considerable evidence to suggest that the tide is turning and suggesting that "if enough people are seized by the vision of a world based on integrity and are ready to pay the price involved, it (eliminating corruption) is achievable... The choice is before us."

*Corruption: Who Cares?* may be ordered from Grosvenor Books, P. O. Box 53, Burwood, Victoria 3125; email tomram@optusnet.com.au Price \$17.25 (including packaging & postage) or through your local bookshop, rrp \$14.95



**On Thursday 30 October, TI and Caux Initiatives for Business will host a joint occasion at "Armagh", 226 Kooyong Road, Toorak, Vic 3142, at 7.45 pm for an 8.00 pm start. Brian Lightowler will be present to sign copies of his book.**

All contributions of items, news, comments welcome. Next deadline: Wednesday 24 September '03 to **The Editor, NEWSBRIEFS**, 151 Kent Street, Hughes ACT 2605  
fax: (02) 6281 0940 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  
[www.mra.org.au](http://www.mra.org.au)