



# Pacific women show the power of forgiveness

**Helen Mills writes of her first encounter with the Solomon Islands where she went with Liz Weeks to assist Creators of Peace Circles programmes:**

As our plane circled across the tropical forests of Guadalcanal and the sparkling waters of Iron Bottom Sound (so named because of sunken WWII ships), I found myself thinking of my father who flew across these beautiful islands piloting his RNZAF Catalina Flying boat. As a child I had been fascinated by his pictures of campsites under shady palm trees and his meticulous logbook detailing wartime reconnaissance journeys.

A few days later I, too, found myself sitting under shady palm trees, sharing stories with women who had come from homes and villages across the Solomon Islands. It was only a week after my mother's funeral, and I told them her experience of finding forgiveness and healing with a woman of a different ethnic group in New Zealand over historically-disputed land. It resonated with these women, gathered for a Creators of Peace (CoP) Circle.

**Liz Weeks** and I had spent weeks preparing materials to be used for

the CoP workshop and facilitation training, and waiting for funding to come through from two Solomon Islands ministries: the National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace Ministry, and Women, Youth and Children's Affairs. Finally, we touched down in tropical Honiara at the end of February and were welcomed by Winds of Change friends, with garlands of delicate spider orchids and ginger flowers. They, too, had been working hard to bring together the 36 women leaders who came to the workshop by canoe, plane, bus and foot from four island provinces. The women represented ten major church and women's organizations, from 18 villages and from Honiara.

After training six local facilitators for one day, we launched with them into three Peace Circles, and for four days immersed ourselves in powerful story sharing and grass-roots peace-building. Most sharing was in the local Pijin dialect. But they eagerly grasped key CoP themes, presented in English, such as what destroys or builds peace, the power of forgiveness, and the wisdom of listening to the inner voice.

Five articles about the CoP training appeared in the daily *Solomon Star*. **Judith Siota**, regional women's coordinator for the Anglican Church of Melanesia, was quoted in three articles: 'Sharing stories of conflict, on issues of violence, family and ethnic tensions, enables women to address the roots of conflict and create peace in their communities. It is hard to forgive but if there is peace in the heart, it is easy.'

Another participant and facilitator, **Ellen Leni**, spoke of her horrific experiences during the ethnic violence a decade ago: 'It is time to forget the past and rebuild peace in this beautiful country - this is the power of forgiveness. We need to honor each other and work together.' Her story, featured on a full page of the *Solomon Star*, highlighted her determination to return to her area of the Guadalcanal Weathercoast and to use the Creators of Peace Circle materials with women still trying to rebuild their lives after years of ethnic conflict.

On the final day for all the CoP participants - on facilitating

*continued over*



*Creators of Peace Circle participants in Solomon Islands*

Peace Circles – women began to own the material and plan for how to use it effectively in their churches and village communities.

Winds of Change (the IofC body in Solomon Islands) has been working with IofC Australia since 2004 to organize and facilitate peace and reconciliation workshops and conferences. This latest initiative was part of a three-year Strategic Plan. **Leonard Paia**, Chairman of Winds of

Change, explained that ‘we need the approach of training facilitators as we do not have the resources to take this peace-building initiative throughout the country.’

Our thanks go to IofC Australia and IofC Sweden who also helped with the funding for this Winds of Change programme.

Liz Weeks adds: ‘Staying on a few days after the workshop gave us some special moments – with conversations on the place of land in the culture and future of the country, and inspiring

stories of rehabilitating prisoners. Visiting a temporary ‘shack’ with a million dollar view, we learned from a family who are building their home using locally-made bricks and assisting a pilot project to create an environmentally sustainable future. When asked about returning, our answer was “Yes certainly, whenever invited”. The Solomon Islanders have the vision for the future and our partnering with them continues to be a privilege.’

## Burma emerging ‘out of the shadow’

Maung Maung Thaug was a student of mining engineering at RMIT in Melbourne 50 years ago when he came to live at Armagh, the IofC Australia Pacific centre in Melbourne. A Buddhist from Burma, he had been confronted by the drinking culture and discrimination in Australia. From those experiences, he and John Williams wrote a play while at Armagh called *Out of the Shadow*. Supported by MRA-IofC, it was performed at RMIT and in Canberra.

Now, at last, after years of isolation and suffering, his native Burma is emerging ‘Out of the Shadow’. And Thaug with this wife, **Miynt Miynt Aye**, are jubilant to be part of it.

On the weekend of the historic election, they gave a passionate account of Burma’s struggle for democracy to participants at a national gathering of IofC meeting at Armagh.

Though he has lived mostly in Australia since those student years, the 10 years from 1969 he spent working in mines in Burma showed the realities under military rule.

Their last visit, in January, was different. He and his wife had a 30 minute audience with Nobel Laureate **Daw Aung San Suu Kyi**, whose family had been friends of Thaug’s family for 60 years. Suu Kyi’s mother was involved in MRA (now IofC) after the assassination of her husband, Independence hero Gen. Aung San, in 1947. She had taken her daughter to a conference in Caux, Switzerland.

When Madam Aung San was ill with diabetes Daw Suu, living in UK with her two young sons, wanted her sick



Maung Maung Thaug with Daw Suu Kyi

mother to join her there so that she could look after her. She consulted with Thaug on this personal family matter. Thaug wrote a strong letter to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi reminding her that many people in Burma flock to her mother’s lake side residence (Aung San Suu Kyi’s present residence) for counselling on various matters, like a Buddhist monastery where lay people come for counselling from the abbot.

Thaug urged Daw Suu explicitly to leave her mother in Rangoon and to visit her frequently while, at the same time, getting a feel the pulse of the nation. By coincidence Daw Suu was on a visit to nurse her sick mother in 1988 when she was enlisted by the democratic forces in Burma to take up their cause in Burma.

In January this year, Thaug and his wife went from Burma (or Myanmar, as officially known) to the ‘Dialogue on Democracy’ conference at the IofC centre in India. They took with them a DVD carrying a special message from Aung San Suu Kyi which was played at the opening session (see ‘Burma on the Verge of Democracy’, February *Newsbriefs*). In her video message, Suu Kyi said, ‘We in Burma need to be independent

from our own weaknesses.’

At the Melbourne meeting, Thaug and his wife described decades of conflict with the ethnic minorities which comprise 40% of Myanmar’s population. It is the most diverse ethnic grouping country in SE Asia. He said the country has no future unless the present government can unify the different ethnic group to fully participate in the affairs of the state.

He believes that IofC, with worldwide experiencing over six decades reconciling diverse groups and nations, may possibly have a part to play in the new democratic Burma.

**Visier Sanyu**, whose Naga people live both in India and Burma, is a Refugee Coordinator for Act for Peace which supplies aid for Burmese refugees in Thailand. ‘People like us Nagas can make a mess, playing India against Burma – or we can help bring Burma together. That is our choice,’ he said.

**Mike and Jean Brown** from Adelaide showed pictures from their visit to Yangon in February – including people of different ethnic groups who were deeply moved on hearing about reconciliation and the Rudd apology in Australia.



## Focus for the region: human security and trust-building

Almost a year ago, Fijian academic and activist Mosese Waqa spoke at a national meeting of IofC Australia of the growing concerns around human and environmental security in many Pacific nations and of the urgent need for Australia to find different relationships with the region.

In December Mosese, who lives with his wife and family in Melbourne, became Coordinator of a 'Human Security-Trust Building' programme of IofC in the Australia-Pacific region. The aim of this initiative is to build 'a coalition of conscience' among people who can focus the 'moral imperatives of human security' and establish trust to work together for solutions.

In February, Mosese facilitated a weekend workshop at Armagh in Melbourne, with the intention of 'doing human security "in community"', where the sum total of our collective resourcefulness... is greater than our numbers'.

Now in April, at the national gathering of IofC in Melbourne, one full day focused on human security initiatives: starting with reflection on 'personal insecurities', then community/ group actions to the international Caux Forum for Human Security. John Bond, who now coordinates the Caux Forum was visiting Melbourne. He described how

a team is forming to tackle the issues of Africa's 'resources curse' (where resource-rich countries have half the growth rate of those without – the DR Congo, for instance, is bottom of the UN human development index).

The day's focus, however, was on this region. Brainstorming, everyone pitched in their experiences of trust-building, living-sustainably and good governance. An active, living resource was revealed among those in the room.

### Heal the chain of hatred

Focus groups reported back on pre-existing and still-forming initiatives, which had come together at the February workshop. Sri Lankan-born **Jeremy Liyanage** described a project to 'heal the chain of hatred' between Muslims and Tamils in the north-west of the country after war – an effort modelled by those supporting it among the diaspora in Australia. Jeremy leaves this week to scope the programme in Sri Lanka.

Similarly, young South Sudanese in Melbourne have begun a sensitive dialogue across the ethnic divisions which, in the nine months since independence, have left thousands dead in their new nation. Two at the heart of this dialogue have lost relatives on both sides of the conflict.

**Aris Huang** updated the gathering on inter-racial trust-building between young Indonesians that he experienced at the IofC youth camp outside Jakarta (see *Newsbriefs* Feb. 2012).

An indigenous/ non-indigenous dialogue at Monash University is shaping up, led by an Aboriginal faculty member who attended last year's Asia Pacific Youth Conference. **Rob Wood** described the long walk being undertaken by a multi-racial group from Healesville to the Victorian Parliament, following the route of William Barak in the 1850s, interceding for the rights of his people. It is gaining support from the Wurundjeri Trust.

Reports by women involved in a string of Creators of Peace Circles, both in Australia and overseas, gave a glimpse of this growing programme, which has now published a five-year international strategic plan.

The meeting went on to wider-ranging issues such as 'restoring earth's degraded lands', one of the priorities of the Caux Forum.

Through it all, as Mosese said, is the thought: 'We need restorative/ life-giving ways of being and doing – a new paradigm that puts the genuine care for people and our planet at the centre of what we are about.'

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## 'Blowing away the cobwebs with a breath of fresh air'

A long way from her home in Sydney, Shoshana Faire went to South Africa in February, invited by the IofC team to help them 'rediscover the importance of teamwork, fellowship and friendship, and to blow away cobwebs where we might have got stuck'.

A professional facilitator, mediator and author, Shoshana has been involved with IofC, facilitating Creators of Peace Circles.

In a two-day workshop outside Johannesburg, she led 13 people in drawing up a timeline of the history of IofC in South Africa, showing turning points and mapping the vision of IofC during different periods.

Participants especially appreciated

the honest conversations, which provided a chance to clear some wrong assumptions. They learned tools for trust-building, as the group discovered individual styles of behaviour and each one's weaknesses/ strengths. At the end of two days, the group drew up a list of 'Operating Principles' to guide ongoing teamwork.

**Cleo Mohlaodi**, one of the younger participants, said the workshop 'built a new foundation for three generations to work together'. **Jackie Euvrard**, a long-term member of the IofC team, wrote that it 'was a breath of fresh air (which) has kick started us into wanting to move forward.'



Shoshana Faire in South Africa

# Initiatives of Change in the global economy

What message does IofC have for those working with the hard realities of business and the markets? Melbourne-based Mohan Bhagwandas is the International Coordinator of IofC's 'Trust and Integrity in the Global Economy' programme. He maps out what has developed:



In 2008 the 'global financial crisis' saw well-established banks and institutions go bust. More than one analysis pointed to a 'moral crisis' at the heart of the global economy. In December 2011 the British Prime Minister summed it up saying that Britain had been 'unwilling' to 'distinguish right from wrong', and warned that 'moral neutrality is not going to cut it anymore'.

IofC's 'Trust and Integrity in the Global Economy' (TIGE) programme is a deliberate attempt to address this 'moral crisis'.

**Frank Buchman**, founder of IofC (known then as Moral Re-Armament) saw the direct connection between a stable economy and peace in the world. In the post World War II years, leading a movement for reconciliation between war-torn countries in Europe and Asia, Buchman began to articulate the need for stable economies, based on integrity and moral principles to ensure an enduring peace. His most quoted statements in the 1950s were:

*'Human nature can be changed, that is the root of the answer. National economies can be changed, that is the fruit of the answer. World history can be changed, that is the destiny of our age.'*

and

*'There is enough in the world for everyone's need, but not for everyone's greed. If everyone cared enough and shared enough, everyone will have enough. Empty hands will be filled with work. Empty stomachs will be filled with food. And empty hearts will be filled with an idea that really satisfies.'*

That kind of thinking attracted some influential people in the business and industrial sector as well as government. It brought France's

Foreign Minister, **Robert Schuman**, and Chancellor **Konrad Adenauer** of Germany to Caux. Buchman was insightful enough to know much hinged on what these two leaders might be able to do for the future.

On 9 May 1950, when Schuman proposed the creation of a community of peaceful interests to Germany and other European countries, he performed an historic act. Extending a hand to recent enemies he wiped away the bitterness of war and the weight of the past. But he also sparked off a completely novel process in the international order. Through this initiative, the European Union was born.

In those post war years, Caux conferences focused on reconciliation as a key for moving towards economic and social well-being. This process brought many to Caux from all sides of industry.

By the 1960s-1970s, some business leaders conceived the idea of annual conferences at Caux to address how industry could respond to the needed global changes. By 1973 the Caux Conferences for Business and Industry (CCBI) were launched with the theme: 'Industry's role in building a new society'.

In the 1980s, when trade tensions grew between Europe and Japan, influential business figures, like **Frits Philips** of the Philips Corporation and **Ryuzaburo Kaku**, Chairman of Canon, gave leadership in creating the Caux Round Table. The CCBI conferences continued with annual themes like 'Moral foundations for a market economy' (1991).

By 2005, Philips and Kaku were no longer able to offer that leadership. It was clear that these business conferences needed to move into a new phase. Caux had to respond to the changing scene in the world. A new initiative was launched, under 'Trust and Integrity in the Global Economy', to bring change around the new issues of economy, environment, sustainability, food security and social enterprise – all based on inner

transformation and commitment to core moral values. I received a request from IofC Switzerland to play a role as International Coordinator in developing this programme.

From the start, I knew it was right. As a young man, working in a factory in Sri Lanka, I had experienced – day after day – the sheer hardship of people working in unimaginable conditions. With asbestos roofing and no ventilation, the inside temperature was over 40 degrees. I said to myself, 'Whatever I do, I will make sure my life is used to make a difference for these people.'

*Initiatives of Change's* mission – 'transform yourself, then transform society' – made absolute sense to me. Behind everything I have done, that's been my driving engine. Poverty still exists. Exploitation still prevails. Doing something about it has been a work in progress.

I was extremely privileged to move to this 'lucky country'. In 1995 I got a consulting job in an IT company with 40 people which, by 2001, had grown to a global company of 5,000. This experience gave me an understanding of the reality of how things worked from inside the corporate world. You can have the nicest people in an organization, but if the larger systems and culture they work with don't have integrity at the core, then things will fall apart.

Through TIGE we have started to build a network of professionals with integrity. This July the conference in Caux will hear from the Managing Director of Lloyds Banking Group in Scotland and a corporate lawyer who chairs the City of London's 'Values Forum'.

The CEO/ founder of a booming biotechnology company from Mumbai will join Texas businesswoman **Margaret Heffernan**, whose latest book *Wilful Blindness* was shortlisted as one of the six best business books of 2011 by *The Financial Times*/Goldman Sacks.

It is still a work in progress; anyone can join. See [www.cib.iofc.org](http://www.cib.iofc.org)

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