



Initiatives of Change

Copenhagen – promises not yet fulfilled

Tom Duncan attended the Copenhagen conference on climate change on behalf of Initiatives of Change. Tom is the Strategic Sustainability Planner and Engineer for Manningham City Council, Victoria, and co-director of the Environment and Economic Group of the Caux Forum for Human Security (organised by Initiatives of Change). He reports:



L-R: Geoffrey Lean, Tom Duncan, Francis Ward, Rishab Kanna and Marcia Lee

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), held its 15th Conference of Parties (COP 15) 7–18 December, 2009 in Copenhagen with Prime Ministers and Presidents from 119 nations personally attending. The conference aimed to set the foundations for a global treaty to combat climate change and utilised the latest science from the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change), chaired by Nobel Peace Prize winner Rajendra Pachauri. The IPCC does not make recommendations on targets for global greenhouse gas emissions, but Pachauri recently stated in a personal capacity that: “What is happening, and what is likely to happen, convinces me that the world must be really ambitious and very determined at moving toward a 350 (parts per million CO₂) target.”

The new benchmark of 350ppm CO₂ (which corresponds to a probable 1.5°C temperature rise as opposed to previous targets of 450ppm and a 2°C rise) was spearheaded by the group 350.org, with support from eminent global leaders such as Desmond Tutu and David Suzuki. It was swiftly adopted by a global consensus of NGOs as the “safe” upper limit of emissions, and this target was adopted by several voting blocs, including the Alliance for Small Island States and the Least Developed Countries (LDCs). The coordinator of 350.org for South Asia is Rishab Khanna, from the Indian

Youth Climate Network, who also convened the environment workshops during IofC's 2009 Caux Conference, “Trust and Integrity in the Global Economy”.

In Copenhagen, Rishab joined a group of us from the Caux Forum for Human Security (myself, Francis Ward from UK, Jennifer Hegelson and Marcia Lee from the USA) in working to build trust across the divides between groups where trust is lacking. We were lucky enough to have additional support from veteran UK environmental journalist Geoff Lean; Martin Frick, Director of the Global Humanitarian Forum; Nithiyananthan Nesadurai, President of the Environmental Protection Society, Malaysia (and a former Caux Scholar); and Cleo Paskal, a Senior Fellow at London's Chatham House. As members of the Caux Forum's Environment and Economic Working Group, we invited key leaders and decision makers to the next Caux Forum for Human Security in July 2010.

The Danish IofC team helped accommodate us, providing a warm and welcome place to stay. Fellow Aussie, Erik Parsons, and his wife Christina, organised many dinners at the IofC centre in Copenhagen, giving us a chance to meet local Danes and find out what they are doing to make a difference in their country and region.

Whilst the Copenhagen conference was disappointing for most of those who attended, as well as for those looking on with high hopes from around the world, there were some major victories, including getting 350ppm CO₂ into the main treaty text, and the beginnings of a global consensus around 350ppm. The non-legally-binding “Copenhagen Accord”, calls for nations to announce their commitments by January 2011. However, the extension of the existing Kyoto Protocol into a Phase II was not agreed upon, casting doubt over the commitment of rich nations to a legally binding treaty for deep emission cuts.

Adding insult to injury, none of the

rich (Annex 1) nations have actually achieved the targets for emission cuts agreed upon in the original Kyoto Protocol. This certainly did not aid the negotiations, because the core element – trust – was nowhere to be seen. Too many broken promises, dashed hopes and past failures ensured that political game-playing and posturing took centre stage, instead of the cooperation and trust-building needed to get a fair global agreement that will ensure the survival of those most at risk – the world's poor, and the 70% of species that are endangered by climate change.

The Copenhagen Accord was made by countries that together emit 85% of the world's emissions including, importantly, China, India and South Africa, representing the developing world's biggest emitters. Small island states which are fast disappearing under rising sea levels, such as the Maldives, Tuvalu, Kiribati, Barbados, and the Marshall Islands, had put forward a target of limiting global warming to 1.5°C. The Copenhagen Accord weakened this to “under 2°C”. The least developed countries mostly supported the Accord, with opposition coming from Zimbabwe, Venezuela, Sudan and Bolivia.

With the Accord calling for the major emitters to make their emissions cut commitments by January 2011, it is of the utmost importance that the senate bills in the USA and Australia – nations that have stood outside of the Kyoto Protocol – pass, bringing in new laws and legally binding mechanisms to reduce emissions. Without this, the mistrust and cynicism that have marred international negotiations thus far will only deepen. The task ahead is important, and all efforts need to be made to ensure that these key countries pass bold legislation. President Nasheed of the Maldives summed up the feelings of the world's islands and least developed countries by stating that a 2°C rise “would be a suicide pact... 350ppm and 1.5°C is actually a matter of survival for us”.

Parliament of the World's Religions

The fifth Parliament of the World's Religions took place in Melbourne, 3-9 December 2009, with over 6,000 participants from 200 countries representing all the world's major faiths. Mike Lowe reports:

PHOTO: Mike Lowe



Lion dancers at the Parliament of the World's Religions

Part religious festival, part pageant, the Parliament was above all a massive conference and meeting of hearts, minds and spirits. At any one time there were up to 20 sessions happening simultaneously.

Major themes were discussed: the role of religions in resolving conflicts; how to get moral and spiritual values into economic life; the insights of indigenous peoples; climate change and more.

In the words of Martin Frick, Director of the Global Humanitarian Forum, "It is the world's largest gathering of grassroots organizations" – over four billion people claim allegiance to one or another religion. Frick was there to engage with faith groups over climate change, with the help of Initiatives of Change, before heading to Copenhagen for the COP15 meeting. This was achieved in several ways, including a series of video interviews (available on the Initiatives of Change Environment blog <http://iofcenvironment.wordpress.com/>).

A 60 metre scroll was also sent to the Copenhagen conference inscribed with messages and prayers from participants at the Parliament.

Among those attending were some of the world's leading Muslim thinkers such as Professor Tariq Ramadan, Dr Chandra Muzaffar and Imam Abdul Feisal Rauf. President Obama sent some of his senior staffers to the Parliament to learn from Muslim leaders how best to interact with the Muslim world. Rauf was quoted as saying "It was a great

indicator of hope, and an important part of the parliament".

Professor Hans Küng launched a manifesto for a global economic ethic, building on the work done over the last decade-plus on distilling and clarifying the shared moral values of the world's religions. If these values were ignored, he said, the world would probably sink into another financial crisis worse than the last, because several

crises were interlinked: economic, climate change, poverty and wars.

The programme included several offerings by *Initiatives of Change* including a Creators of Peace workshop and a session on "Learning to forgive: healing our past, creating our future" featuring IofC author Michael Henderson. The documentary film *The Imam and the Pastor* by IofC's FLTfilms was screened and discussed in two separate sessions facilitated by Professor Paul Wee from the Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University, who knows the two Nigerian peacemakers personally and has worked with them in Africa. Michael Henderson's session was attended by Alexandra Asseily, the driving force behind the Garden of Forgiveness in Beirut, who has worked with the IofC team in Lebanon.

An IofC stand in the exhibition hall of the Parliament, manned by a large roster of volunteers from the IofC Melbourne team, provided another focal point to interact with participants and to sell books and videos. There were so many unexpected encounters, ranging from being interviewed by Iranian TV to meeting people with warm memories of Moral

Re-Armament (as IofC was previously known) going back up to 50 years ago.

The final day of the Parliament saw the Dalai Lama take the stage alongside Auntie Joy Murphy Wandin, senior Elder of the Kulin Nation who had welcomed the participants to the traditional lands of her Aboriginal people six days earlier. Picking up the central theme of the Parliament, "Making a World of Difference", the Dalai Lama told us, "now is the time to act".

Can anyone be a peacemaker?

Outside the official programme, Armagh, the IofC centre in Melbourne, hosted two occasions with speakers from the Parliament. The first, "Can anybody be a peacemaker?", featured Michael Henderson and Sulak Sivaraksa, Thai founder of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists, who has worked over many decades to fight injustice and discrimination in Asia.

Sivaraksa said that to become a peacemaker required qualities of honesty and humility. "Try to do it, not because of yourself. In the Christian context you are guided by the Holy Spirit. In the Buddhist context you are guided by Bhodhisattva. It is not you who will achieve peace." Secondly, he said, "you must take the other side seriously... listen to them." He spoke of his own experiences trying to build bridges of trust with the Muslim and Malay minorities in the south of his country. "We Thais have been exploiting the Malays. If you go out to them you must be honest and ask for their forgiveness."



PHOTO: Mike Lowe

Parliament of the World's Religions continued...

As well as compassion for those who have been oppressed, he said, it was important to also understand the oppressors. "As the Christians say, you must hate the sin but not the sinner. To love humanity is easy but to love your neighbour is not very easy."

Henderson spoke about the need to "hate-proof" society in a world where "every perceived wrong and every historic wrong is out there on the internet and immediately accessible through Google". His own contribution, he said, was to tell stories of people reaching out to the "other". The occasion was the Australian launch of his latest book *No Enemy to Conquer* – one of several he had written dealing with the theme of forgiveness.

Forgiveness was a process rather than an event, said Henderson. "There is always a next step." He told the story of Jo Berry whose father was killed when the Provisional Irish Republican Army blew up the Grand Hotel in Brighton in an attempt to kill Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and the British Cabinet. The man responsible for planting the bomb, Patrick Magee, was released from prison (where he was serving eight consecutive life-sentences) under the terms of the 1998 Good Friday Peace Agreement. Since then Jo and Patrick had had a series of conversations. Jo described the choice she faced, either "to stay as a victim, blaming others for my pain, or to go on a journey of healing and understanding."

Part of that journey involved wrestling with the question of "how best to honour our ancestors?"

"When Jo spoke of forgiveness on British TV she received a death threat from someone who said she had betrayed her father and her country. Pat [Magee] wrestles with the question of how best to honour the commitment of the Irish nationalists who came before him. If you admit that a course of action was wrong are you then accused of betraying your heroes? Can new situations allow you to adopt new truths. Neither Pat nor Jo are comfortable with the word forgiveness. But to my mind they are on a journey that shouts that out whatever the outcome."

A second evening, "Sparks of peace", featured a group of Jewish,

Christian and Muslim peacemakers from the Holy Land. Ibtisam Mahamid, a Palestinian woman whose family had been dispossessed in 1948, described the emotions she had felt after being thrown off a bus for no reason other than that she looked Palestinian Arab. She then moved from hatred to trying to understand the pain, suffering and fear which lay behind these actions. Reading about the holocaust, she said, she "cried for a week". Each of the group had similar experiences of reaching out to understand the pain of the other, which enabled them to work on bringing down the walls of fear and mistrust.

The audience reflected the multi-faith nature of the event, with many from Jewish, Christian and Muslim backgrounds.



PHOTO: Rahul Kapadia

Jewish, Christian and Muslim peacemakers from the Holy Land speaking at the IofC centre in Melbourne

Peacemaking in Perth

Prior to the Parliament of the World's Religions, Michael Henderson spoke at a public meeting in Perth organised by Initiatives of Change. Lindsay Cartwright reports:

There was a responsive audience when Michael Henderson spoke at the Loftus Community Centre in Leederville on Saturday 28 November on the subject, "Peacemaking through forgiveness". Among those present were a well-known Imam and people from the Jewish community.

At the outset, Michael recalled his visit to Perth in 1970 with the IofC musical *Anything to Declare*. A special song for Perth was written

entitled "City of a thousand sunny days".

During a time for questions somebody asked, "How can forgiveness move from the head to the heart?" In response, Michael said, "It takes time. You have to wait for the right moment. You don't have to ask for forgiveness. Wait on God for his leading"

Penny Herd leapt forward and gave two examples of forgiveness from the

recent Creators of Peace conference in Sydney. She told of a Russian who asked forgiveness of an Afghan and of an Indonesian who asked forgiveness of a delegate from East Timor.

After the talk, Michael signed copies of his new book *No Enemy to Conquer*. All available copies were sold.

In Brief

IofC Indonesia held a three-day workshop in Bogor 4-6 December 2009 on the theme of saying 'no' to terrorism, extremism and radicalism, in partnership with the Indonesia Conference for Religion and Peace, YMCA Metro and Nahdlatul Ulama students. It was very much an interfaith exercise. Lily Munir, who was a speaker at the recent Creators of Peace conference in Sydney, was one of the facilitators. A report is available in the latest newsletter, *IofC Indonesia*

Updates, which can be downloaded from www.iofc.org/newsletters It also features news of the latest in their series of youth camps: Change Starts with Me.

Rajmohan Gandhi, President of IofC International, and his wife Usha, will be visiting Indonesia 9-13 March 2010 as part of a journey as to various countries where young IofC teams are taking responsibility. They will be accompanied by Rob Lancaster from Canberra.

As we go to press, the IofC centre in Melbourne, Armagh, is abuzz with 20

young people from nine countries who are taking part in the **Life Matters** course. The nine-day course explores themes such as identity, relationships, responding to conflict creatively, service and inner reflection, and aims to help participants find a path and purpose for life. Several of the overseas participants will stay on for a further two-week "extension programme" giving further opportunities to learn from change-makers in Melbourne.

The art of inner listening

At the Creators of Peace conference in Collaroy, NSW, September 2009, Mary Lean led a session on "inner listening". This is an extract from her notes.

PHOTO: Chloe Smith



Iinner listening is about connecting with the wisdom which is deepest within us, in that still centre where we are most truly ourselves, beneath the whirlpool of our thoughts and emotions. Mahatma Gandhi called it listening to the "inner voice". It may speak to us in words, or in images, or something beyond both. Some understand inner listening as paying attention to the essence of our being; others as opening up to God, or to the compassion of the Universe.

What seems to be common to all traditions is that in silence we can find

strength, wisdom, energy, direction, confidence, inspiration: the resources we need to be agents of change and creators of peace, in our personal lives and in the world around us. Gandhi said, "I shall lose my usefulness the moment I stifle the still small voice within."

It's very simple: all it involves is setting aside time to be still and silent, to be open, to reflect, to be. And yet it's often extremely difficult to make that time, for all sorts of reasons.

I used to be really scared of prolonged silence – afraid of boredom, but also of being overwhelmed by the

emotions I might find within me. When I really tried it, I discovered that that my "inner voice", which I associate with God, did not speak in the angry censorious tones I had so often ascribed to it. Instead it was gentle, loving, patient and often humorous. As a result I became a bit of a silence junkie. But I still find it difficult to find the time, and the will, to be silent.

There are many different ways to listen. The trick is to find the way that works for you. The first and vital step is to make the time. You may also find it helpful to have a special place, or to create one in one in your imagination – sitting by a pool or a fountain, opening up like a flower in the sun. It can help to start by doing a relaxation exercise, listening to music, reading from a sacred text or looking at a picture or an object. You may want to write down the thoughts that come.

Whatever you do, the key thing is to be patient. We only have one species of kingfisher in Britain: small, brightly coloured and very fast. Often all you see is a flash of blue. A kingfisher is something that happens to you. There is nothing you can do except be near water, looking in the right direction at the right time. It's the same with spiritual insight. All you can do is be there, and be ready, but you can't make it happen. And in some way, even though this is hard to accept, the waiting can be part of it.

This issue edited by Mike Lowe. Contributions, news and comments welcome. Next deadline: Monday 22 March 2010, to **The Editor, NEWSBRIEFS, 226 Kooyong Road, Toorak VIC 3142** Fax and Phone: (03) 9822 6871 E-mail: mike.lowe@iofc.org - New subscriptions and address changes: **NEWSBRIEFS, 226 Kooyong Road, Toorak, VIC 3142**

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