



Initiatives of Change

A letter from Rajmohan Gandhi

Indian journalist and author, Rajmohan Gandhi, is the new President of Initiatives of Change - International, the body which affiliates Initiatives of Change societies worldwide. He writes:

20th January, 2009

Dear friends,

It is with joy, high expectations and a little trepidation that I begin my service as President of IofC-International. This movement of the spirit helped me, when I was 21, to find a great purpose for my life and has nurtured my faith since. Now perhaps more than ever that spirit is needed in our troubled world.

To follow in the footsteps of my predecessors as President, Cornelio Sommaruga and Mohamed Sahnoun, is daunting. They have brought expansive hearts, penetrative minds, a network of influential friends, and a large spirit to their role. They have raised our sights, expanded our reach and deepened our conviction. On behalf of all of us I thank them.

The world may be at a watershed moment in its history. The global financial crisis, renewed conflict in the Middle East, climate change, and natural and man-made disasters in Africa and elsewhere, bring grave suffering to countless millions and leave few of us untouched. At times our modern world seems on the brink of breakdown.

Our good fortune is to know, in part through the wisdom of Frank Buchman, that humanity's extremity can be a moment of great opportunity. Renewed awareness of the cost of greed and corruption can inspire new honesty and unselfishness in each of us. Our propensity to demonise "the other" can give way to fresh compassion. The failure of small and short-term thinking can strengthen our resolve to see the larger picture and take the longer view.

President Obama has awakened hope in the hearts of many worldwide. This great nation of America, which has provided a home for my wife Usha and me for the last several years, could yet play a reconciling role in the world. We should do all we can to support its re-emerging sense of responsibility and service.

Initiatives of Change is prepared by its history and values to make a contribution at this difficult moment which may also be a moment of opportunity. It will do so not from a position of human strength, nor by seeking recognition or status, but through humbly pointing towards, and responding to, the timeless wisdom which has always been available to guide anyone willing to listen and act.

In taking up my role as IofC President I am touched by the trust reposed in me. I ask for your prayers - and count on our partnership.

With all best wishes for 2009.

Rajmohan Gandhi - President, IofC-International

Change starts with who?...me?

Nigel Heywood from NSW, a co-ordinator of Action for Life (Afl) 4, sends this news from India:

On 1st October 2008, 35 people from 14 countries came together for the beginning of the 4th Action for Life. The aim is to develop a new generation of change makers equipped with integrity and faith who are committed to transformation in the world by starting with themselves. Our motto comes from Mahatma Gandhi, "Be the change you want to see in the world."

It's a big vision to fulfil, with the biggest financial crash in the last 100 years, devastation in the Middle East and environmental meltdown - it is hard to know where to start. According to

Gandhiji, it's with yourself.

Deborah Sullivan (Melbourne participant): The deep sharing at an emotional level by the men in Action for Life has forced me to face a prejudice that I did not think I had - that men are not that deep in their relationships. However, the depth of feeling and true courage I have seen from the men on Afl gives me great hope for the future, particularly in creating a world where there is deep respect and care between the sexes.

Nigel continues: The first two months training focused on development in:

understanding the needs of the world and how each life can be part of the solution; creating a space for people's spiritual journey; learning to care for others; and skills in workshop delivery and team building. Then four teams travelled out across India, to North, North East, Central India and South. These teams were delivering a message of hope that change in all areas is possible when people change. They met students, business people, politicians, social leaders, religious teachers, orphans, families and those who have given up everything to serve others.

Continued on page 2 >>

Report of Action for Life 4 in India, cont'd...

Alex Birnberg (Australia, Co-ordinator, Afl4) shares fieldwork experience:

I travelled to North India and our team met deeply inspiring people, and saw absorbing sights which will stay with us for the rest of our lives. Our team also had tough struggles in accepting each other and dealing with the intensity of living closely together for seven weeks. Our leadership team became fragmented and I withdrew without asking for help. With little communication or sharing of feelings, more problems occurred. Fortunately, I and my other team leaders get another crack at working together when we lead another team to Malaysia and Indonesia (8th February – 10th April). This time, open, fearless communication between us is a top priority. Action for Life continues to stretch me to the limit, giving me insights about myself and leadership I could never have imagined.

With the final month in India coming to a close on 8th February, the teams will head out into South and South East Asia with one of the main aims being to build partnerships and networks with Initiatives of Change teams throughout the region.

Nigel Heywood (Australia, Co-ordinator, Afl4) shares fieldwork experience:

I was deeply touched by a friendship that I struck up with an Afghani student in Bangalore, South India. He shared deeply about his life under the Taliban and running an illegal school for women. We decided to have a time in silence each morning for the next six months and share where we are growing via Email. He began with small changes and started to have thoughts about his country. Before I left he said, "We need

this idea of values-based living in Afghanistan. I could arrange for a group to come when I am back." This challenged me on how prepared I am to go all the way in meeting the needs of the world.

In the past I have joined Afl for my own spiritual growth, friendship and to build a community that keeps transforming, but this time around I had to ask myself: "Where is all this heading?" Now I have the beginnings of a bigger vision – that when our lives are wholly given over to a greater spirit we can all be used to meet the needs of the world. But I hold back on this big task because of self doubt, lack of care, small vision, small faith, small hope, and the biggest struggle of all, fear of others.

Now I work towards and pray for a free spirit with all people, to depend on God's love for me and my love for God, rather than the approval of people. To stand alone and still give my life in care for others. As one friend said, God has chosen this path for me and who am I to say "No".

Afl4 concludes in Cambodia on 9th May 2009, after which many of the participants are planning to work on projects within Initiatives of Change teams around the world. If you would like to get our weekly newsletters, log on at www.afl.iofc.org

Helen and John Mills from Adelaide joined the start of Afl4 at Asia Plateau from October to December. Helen shares this reflection with us:

Sitting close to the craggy edge of one of India's largest tablelands, experiencing

the magic moment of dawn breaking over distant hills, was a marking moment for me. The wild flowers and grasses were reflected in the shallow lakes pooled on the tableland from recent monsoon rains, and before me the ploughed and planted terraces dropped away to the valley floor hundreds of metres below. For someone who finds sustenance in the spirituality of the natural world, it felt a satisfying place to be. It triggered memories of my family who have lived in, served and loved the vast Indian subcontinent, and I felt a connection with them stretching back more than 100 years.

This particular sunrise marked the beginning of Afl's seven month leadership program, and around me were 30 others quietly engrossed in the wide vistas unfolding before us. Later, gathered in a circle, we lifted our hands, symbolically holding the reflections and thoughts on why we were there, the doubts and fears and expectations we felt, and then opening our fingers, we released them into that quiet sacred space.

The Dutch theologian, Henri Nouwen, described the practice of opening one's hands and releasing tension from clenched fingers as being a prayerful way to find stillness. It can be an act of helpful insight too. Being practically minded, I've placed value in the work of my hands. But for most of my ten weeks in India, the focus became less on acts of "doing" to more of "being".

It's been helpful to continue to reflect on these things. That Indian sunrise act of symbolically opening both hands and heart remains a significant marking moment for me.

HELP WANTED -

An experienced, willing "handyman" who has some hours free each week or fortnight - whichever is most convenient - to help care for the Australia-Pacific Centre for Initiatives of Change "Armagh", 226 Kooyong Road, Toorak, Victoria 3142.

Jobs include:

- replacing light globes
- putting up picture hooks
- fixing broken taps
- installing new shower heads
- and other general maintenance

Apply to:

Rob or Cheryl
at "Armagh"
(03) 9822 1218.



A unique chance for Australian/Pacific women

Creating a Culture of Peace - What Will It Take?

International Creators of Peace Conference, Sydney, 2009



PHOTO: JANE MILLS

Most of the Sydney conference team

This year Australia has been asked to host the 5th Creators of Peace International Conference (see enclosed invitation). The aim of this conference is to bring together women committed to building peace to explore how peace, and more importantly a culture of peace that can prevent future destructive conflict, can be created at local, regional and international levels. Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, in his book *God has a Dream*, writes: "Until women are deeply involved in opposing the violence in the world, we are not going to bring it to an end... They also have special leverage over the men in their lives, who often perpetuate death while women are left creating life." The conference will take place in the beautiful beach-side Collaroy Centre in Northern Sydney from 30th September to 4th October. Immediately afterwards, a workshop is being offered for those who want further training in how to facilitate Creators of Peace Circles back in their communities.

Creators of Peace Circles

Creators of Peace, a program of Initiatives of Change, is an international network of women committed to building a radical peace, where personal honesty and integrity form the basis of reconciliation. A central part of its program is the Creators of Peace Circle. Over a series of meetings, a diverse group of women workshop practical peace-making skills and share their own stories. These have taken part across the world from South Africa to India, from

workshop for more than 35 people in December 2008. More than 20 have taken place all over Sydney and five more are planned in the coming months.

Two facilitation training workshops are being offered in Sydney, one in late January and one on 22nd February.

International Outreach

International conferences bring together women involved in this work. The Aboriginal leader Jackie Huggins was among the 7 Australians who participated in the 2005 conference in Kampala, Uganda. Trish McDonald-Harrison, who also attended, said: "It was like borrowing the eyes and understanding of the other women there – especially the indigenous women. Suddenly, I could evaluate my own perspective in a whole different way."

Sydney Conference

An international conference is a courageous undertaking, and most of the Sydney conference team (see picture) have fulltime jobs. However, we are meeting regularly and developing the systems and structures for a wonderful event. Already we have heard of people from Norway, Denmark, the Americas, Africa, UK, Taiwan and other parts of Asia, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, and Solomon Islands, to name a few, who are hoping to attend. Chea Vannath, an outstanding community worker and anti-corruption fighter from Cambodia, and Kay Lindahl from USA, author of *The Sacred Art of Listening*, have shown interest in coming. Linda Burney, Minister for Community Services and

UK to Sudan.

The first Australian Creators of Peace Circle took place in Adelaide in 2003. Since then, there have been Circles and workshops in Perth, Melbourne, Canberra, Honiara, Suva and Port Moresby, where Trish McDonald-Harrison ran a

the first Aboriginal to serve in the NSW Government, will speak at the opening occasion. Local Aboriginal women will open the conference with a traditional smoking ceremony and Welcome to Country. All who come will experience the essence of a Creators of Peace Circle embedded in the conference program.

There is the possibility that overseas delegates may be able to make visits to other parts of Australia before their return, thus sharing more widely the news and spirit of the conference.

Funding Needed

Much faith and prayer and fundraising is needed for the conference. Women from developing countries and some guest speakers will need travel and accommodation assistance. A Vision Statement is available for any who would like to approach philanthropic or corporate bodies, as well as a list of fundraising suggestions, from the Conference Secretary. In Melbourne, a fund-raiser will take place at Armagh in March to assist women from country Australia to attend, thus building bridges between the country-city divide. In Adelaide, Creators of Peace friends are thinking about a street stall around Easter, a garage sale and even a fundraising dinner later in the year. One Sydney lady is paying her own conference fees as well as the conference fees for a lady from Papua New Guinea. Please think about any part you may have to enable this conference to happen.

Registration

As you will see from the enclosed invitation, there is an early bird fee till 14th February. All conference fees must be paid in full by 15th May as we need to give final figures to the conference centre in May. Donations and registration fees should be sent to Creators of Peace Conference, PO Box 138, Sutherland, NSW 1499.

If you have any questions, ideas and inspiration for this conference, please be in touch with

conferencesecretary@cop.iofc.org

For more information on Creators of Peace and for conference updates, see www.cop.iofc.org

- Trish McDonald-Harrison,
Christina DeAngelis, Jane Mills.

"Father of the House"

On New Year's Day, *The Australian* carried this edited article by Mike Steketee, publicising Kim Beazley Sr's memoir, *Father of the House*:

Principle not power for prescient servant of the people. Kim Beazley Sr was the kind of man who gives politicians a good name. His newly published memoir explores his 32-year parliamentary career.

Kim Beazley Sr spent 32 years in federal parliament but just seven of them in government, which says something about endurance if nothing else. He was inspired in his youth by people such as William Wilberforce, whom many saw as a future British prime minister until he took up the highly unpopular cause of abolishing slavery, and George Grey, who in senior government positions in Western Australia, South Australia and New Zealand treated indigenous people with a dignity rare for the time.

As a country school teacher, Beazley saw a huge gulf between state and private education and wanted to do something about it. "Political action was the obvious course," he writes in his memoir, *Father of the House*, published this month a little more than a year after his death. So he joined the Labor Party and started agitating for more funds for government education. To his surprise, he was approached to run for preselection to succeed John Curtin in the seat of Fremantle in 1945 and, to his even greater surprise, won, becoming at 28, the youngest member of parliament.

His career became a remarkable story of foresight, persistence and adherence to principle. It took Beazley almost three decades to get the opportunity to implement large spending increases for education and to base them on the needs of the schools. Beazley writes that "by the time I was a member of parliament, I was convinced that the Labor Party would never reform education until we broke down the barrier which prevented government money going to Catholic schools."

In 1949, Beazley wrote to Chifley arguing for a referendum to remove discrimination against Aborigines in the Constitution. The Holt government held it 28 years later and it was carried by the largest majority ever seen for a constitutional change.

In 1952, he advocated reconciliation between white and black Australians – the first time the issue had been raised in

parliament. Thirty-nine years later it became a bipartisan commitment, though it remains a work in progress. "In Australia, our ways have mostly produced disaster for the Aboriginal people," Beazley writes. "I suspect that only when their right to be distinctive is accepted will policies become creative." In 1951, he advocated successfully for support for Aboriginal land rights to be included in the Labor Party platform. That was a quarter of a century before the Whitlam government introduced legislation for Aboriginal title to land in the Northern Territory.

In 1963, Beazley argued that if Aborigines were members of the Australian commonwealth "they cannot be dispossessed of land that they occupy without consent or consultation or compensation, or without alternatives being offered to them." That was 29 years before the Mabo judgement.

On international affairs, Beazley said in 1956 that Australia's stability would be determined by the extent to which we earned the respect of Asia: not a popular view following Japan's role in World War II and the perceived menace of communist China.

Beazley's keen intellect was accompanied by compelling oratory. His handicaps, politically speaking, were religion and conscience. He was heavily involved with Moral Re-Armament, a Christian movement that sought to apply religious principles to public issues. It was an affiliation that many Labor colleagues regarded with suspicion. The Australian tradition is to keep religion and politics apart but for Beazley they were inseparable. "If you do not accept the importance of conscience, you accept only the importance of power," he once said.

He was opposed to abortion and to the relaxation of divorce laws under the Whitlam government.

What particularly attracted Beazley to Curtin was "the graciousness of his leadership... However viciously he was attacked, he never struck back."

In Opposition, Beazley learned to give the government credit where it was due and to acknowledge his own party's faults, an approach that helped "move debate on to a genuine consideration of the problems ... For me, honesty meant a decision that I would not play the political game of making cases, suppressing everything inconvenient to my position and playing up everything convenient. This game has many dangers, not least that I found I was convincing myself on the strength of arguments I didn't really believe."

His son, the better known Kim, relates a story his father told him but did not include in the book. When Whitlam resigned from the Labor leadership in 1968 and then recontested it to face down a challenge to his authority from the party machine, left-winger Jim Cairns told Beazley he intended contesting the position but would withdraw if Beazley ran. "I probably don't have the numbers but you would have," he said. Beazley declined the offer, saying that "whatever I might think of Gough, his stance at the moment is correct and therefore I will be voting for him." Added Beazley Jr: "That really was the only time he could have become leader."

The legacy of Beazley Sr was marred by the problems of the Whitlam government, including a too rapid increase in education spending that contributed to its economic mismanagement. But his story overall is one that restores faith in politics.

Father of the House, published by Fremantle Press and available through bookstores (\$27.50), will be launched in Perth on February 9th by former West Australian Premier Geoff Gallop, and in Parliament House Canberra on 11th February by Senator John Faulkner. It is also available from:
Grosvenor Books, 226 Kooyong Road, Victoria 3142 for \$30 incl. p&p.