



*Initiatives of Change*

# Creating a Culture of Peace – what will it take?

*Rebekah Brown gives an overview of the conference in Sydney, 30 September - 4 October.*

From the moment delegates started arriving at The Collaroy Centre, on Sydney's stunning north coast, there was a buzz in the air – the kind of energy that is generated when 235 women from over 30 countries, come together to share their hearts and lives. We had gathered together to attend the 5th Creators of Peace International Conference which was all about exploring "Creating a Culture of Peace – what will it take?"



*Indigenous women give the welcome to country*

At dusk we gathered on the sloping lawn, overlooking Collaroy Beach, to take part in a "smoking ceremony and acknowledgement of country". It was a wonderful way to start the conference: standing together, side-by-side in a circle, feeling a sense of kinship and being welcomed so graciously by our Indigenous sisters in a way that spoke volumes of their generosity of spirit.

Later that evening we were challenged by the power of truth-telling as the NSW Minister for Community Services, Linda Burney, gave the stark statistics of disadvantage among Indigenous women and children. A member of the Wiradjuri nation, Linda was the first Aboriginal person to be elected to the NSW State Parliament.



*Panel speakers from Indonesia, South Africa, Afghanistan, Solomon Islands and Australia*

Day 2 kicked off with a wonderful reflection on the art of listening with Kay Lindahl, founder of The Listening Centre in California. Flying in for the conference, Kay shared the many insights she has gained in her 15 years of work in this area. We learnt that listening is always a choice but that it's also a gift. As the Quaker author Douglas Steere puts it: "To 'listen' another's soul into a condition of disclosure and discovery may be almost the greatest service that any human being ever performs for another."

In the next plenary session – on the theme "what destroys peace and what builds peace" – Filomena Dos Reis, a poet and women's advocate from Timor-Leste, told how she had struggled for five years "to overcome my feelings" after the disappearance of her husband during the conflict in her country. Since then she has worked for restorative justice. "If you live with your hatred and anger, you block yourself from

others," she tells her daughters. "We have to deal with the past as a teacher, to learn things for the future." After she had spoken, a moving reconciliation took place with the Indonesian women present, bringing tears and embraces. In the following days, as regional groups met, Indonesians and Timorese combined their efforts in planning to carry forward the process of Creators of Peace Circles.

On Friday, Mary Lean from the UK talked us through the importance of inner listening – or as she put it "paying attention to the true self" and the role it can play in peace creation. We heard that "silence is a nesting place for hope" and



*Indonesian and Timorese bond through forgiveness*

# Creating a Culture of Peace - what will it take? continued...

that waiting is all part of it. When asked to complete the sentence “Silence is...”, women responded with various words – “uncomfortable”, “confronting”, “a time to connect”, “a transformative space”. Silence, we learnt, is perhaps our greatest tool in becoming the creators of peace we long to be.

After each plenary the delegates met in small groups to give space to go deeper – a valuable time of exploration and discovery, as women were also encouraged to tell their stories. For many women this took great trust and courage. One woman from Papua New Guinea shared that she had never told her story before or been listened to in such a deep way.

We heard from many inspirational women such as Mahboba Rawi from Afghanistan who, despite her own personal tragedies, set up a charity called “Mahboba’s Promise” which supports thousands of orphans in and around Kabul. She shared with us the pain of watching her beloved country be torn apart by Russian occupation.

Zhanna Petrukovich, a young Russian woman, took the opportunity to apologise to Mahboba for the actions of her country – the first time Mahboba had heard any Russian apologise.

The workshops were a fabulous element of the conference with choices ranging from “The aesthetics of peace building” to “Dance”. One highlight was the opportunity to learn traditional rush-weaving and feather flower-making skills from Ngarrindjeri women, from the Coorong in South Australia.

Throughout the conference we were honoured to hear many stories from the First Australians, women who have had so much taken from them – language, culture and in some cases family – and yet are willing to forgive. In the words of Indigenous woman, Walda Blow, “I need peace in my own life before I can promote peace in the lives of others.”

Saturday’s reflection on Inner Peace came from a Buddhist perspective as Rothay Chantharasy shared about her journey from fear to faith. We were reminded that we each have our own unique role to play in the creation of peace. As Trude Aspelung commented, “We learn to be peace makers by truly



*Group meetings: valuable time of exploration and discovery*

knowing who we are, to know our gifts and use them as peace gifts to other humans.”

The public meeting held on Saturday afternoon was well attended, the auditorium filled to capacity to hear several extremely accomplished women speak about their personal commitment to creating this culture of peace in their communities, homes and their own lives. Women such as Barbara Perry, Minister for Local Government in the NSW Parliament, who shared how her faith has taught her that we are to be the salt and light of the world, called to live beyond ourselves. And Lina Hamade, co-founder of a movement bringing dialogue between Muslims and Christians in Lebanon. And Anna Kima, with gripping stories of women forcing their men to dialogue in the conflict in Sudan. Jean Brown challenged us with the idea that peace is the invitation to live differently – to tell a new story.

Throughout the conference the word “forgiveness” came up repeatedly, like “a golden thread that was being woven through every session”. So it was only fitting that the final reflection was on “the power of forgiveness/apology”. Rwandan woman, Didacienne Mukahabeshimana, told the astounding story of how she moved from a place of bitterness and hatred towards the perpetrators who killed her family, to caring for them and even creating

“Umuhuza”, an NGO which helps rehabilitate prisoners accused of taking part in the genocide.

As the conference drew to a close, the delegates one by one revealed the experience that had been most transformational for them. Many commented on the sacredness of the story-sharing, some identified areas in their life needing healing; others spoke of the freedom they had found in forgiveness. One delegate put it like this: “Often in our everyday lives we don’t see each other or know one another but during this conference we’ve really looked into each other’s eyes – into each other’s hearts... I see God in each one of you and I hope you see God in me.”

With the stories and faces of these incredible women etched in our minds, we left with a renewed sense of commitment to be creators of peace in whatever situation we find ourselves.

So what will it take to create a culture of peace? A willing heart, listening to understand, the courage to forgive and perhaps most of all the vision to see things, not as they are now, but how they could be. This week was a glimpse of just that.

A full colour report will be published and can be ordered from IoC Centres.

# 'Life Matters' in western Sydney

Fourteen young people from different cultural backgrounds were participants in a two-day Life Matters workshop near Blacktown in western Sydney at the end of August. They were brought together mainly by Assefa Bekele, Multicultural Liaison Officer with the Blacktown Police, who had been on the committee that organized the program there for last year's visit of Nigerian peace-makers, Imam Muhammad Ashafa and Pastor James Wuye.

Being a large multicultural growth area in Sydney, Blacktown is also the scene of many clashes between community groups. There is a need for young role models particularly to give new direction and meaning for their peers.

"This is the first time I have come to this type of workshop. I have increased my self-knowledge, self-motivation, confidence and understanding of what matters in life and within our community," said one of the participants. Others said they would like

to be involved in future such training programs.

The workshop was facilitated by a mainly younger IofC team from Australia and overseas.

- David Mills, Sydney

## The potential to change a country

*I went to The Solomon Islands looking for something different. At the age of 33, and after eight years experience with IofC, I could feel the calcium setting in my joints. I wanted to see what was developing in the Pacific and what does it mean to make a difference on the ground?*



Workshop for ex-combatants in progress

IofC worker Dave Mills has been going from Sydney to the Solomons for several years and built a remarkable network including politicians, pastors and ex-militants. I was to help him deliver a reconciliation workshop with ex-militants from the ethnic-fighting and villagers. I wondered how soldiers of the jungle would respond to a skinny white

guy. As it turned out they responded well. The three days were a small step towards peace in a troubled paradise.

I saw the way Dave worked with friends in one-to-one and group meetings. He kept encouraging and helping the team clarify their direction all the time. One friend, Martin Moali, lived off backyard vegetables so that he could work with IofC.

I met with Matthew Wale, Minister for Education, and heard his vision for education, for the country and for the Pacific. He and Dave talked in the nights about how Matthew had risked his life during the tensions, about politics and policy, and ways to keep moving The Solomons forward. Two men walking the same path, one at the top in politics and one at the grass roots: what they do could fade away tomorrow or it could change the direction of the country. They move in

faith and they move in a string of people, like a net stretching across the country.

One night Matthew talked about the need for good leaders. "We can have electoral reforms and clean election campaigns, but it comes to nothing without good leaders." It struck home to me – this is the work we are doing, building (and becoming) the leaders who will work from the ground up and the top down. And as Dave clarified, by leaders we mean those who have the faith to follow God's leading.

What I saw was the struggle of a small group of people for the direction of a nation. It is hard teamwork but it has made a difference already in the lives of many. The short two weeks showed me some extraordinary leadership linked across Oceania and I ask myself, "What role am I supposed to play?"

- Nigel Heywood, Manila, NSW

## Too busy to care?

*Recently my mother-in-law, Jean, returned home after a four-month ordeal in hospital. Nicknamed "the miracle woman", she endured three operations and had been given a 1-in-20 chance of surviving. At one point a staff member gloomily diagnosed that she would never walk again. Three days later Jean was walking!*

Notwithstanding our appreciation for the overall medical help Jean received, I think several factors made a difference between life and death:

- 1) many people prayed;
- 2) she had colossal determination not to give up but to return home;
- 3) my husband, Graeme, and his brother each visited the hospital daily, often twice, and at times were more aware than the (changing) doctors what was happening medically for Jean, especially when she was shunted between intensive care, specialists and so

on. At one point, when confronted by staff who questioned continuing the endless blood tests and transfusions, both Graeme and Len were adamant: Jean had no terminal illness and should be given every opportunity to live.

Whilst deeply regretting missed opportunities with my own parents (now-deceased), I humbly offer this thought: that if we're too busy to look after our older people in our society, then we are just too busy. And, as I find through my own work in community aged care, it is we who are enriched through the

"looking after".

As a family we are now savouring the gift of this extended overlap with Jean, who joins us each week for meals. Our oldest son is currently typing her memoirs, putting us in touch with family history dating back to the mid-1800s. She has returned the two borrowed walking frames, and is living independently once more in her own home. And she is planning a trip to New Zealand, soon. At 82, an inspiration!

- Sallie Cordiner, Sydney

## From Caux to Copenhagen:

# A calling relevant for a wounded world

Tom Duncan's life direction has been influenced by his passion and priority to care for the environment. After attending the IofC Life Matters Course in 2004 he worked in China on an AusAid project within the Department of Water Resources. Since then he has been a strategic catchment planner for Melbourne Water and is currently working for Manningham City Council to design a new green civic precinct. In July he travelled to Switzerland to take part in the IofC Caux Scholars Program. Tom writes:

During the first week of the Caux Scholars Program we learnt about the rigorous theory of conflict resolution, peace and trust-building across cultural, religious and philosophical divisions, multi-track diplomacy and models of transformative leadership from well-respected academics.

In week two the Scholars participated in the Caux Forum for Human Security. It began with keynote speaker, Prince El Hassan of Jordan, methodically and emotionally communicating the need for urgent, rapid and decisive action on climate change, with a challenge to become profoundly "bigger than ourselves". Whilst warning of the dangers of not responding quickly enough to climate change, he challenged us to go beyond our conceptions of what was possible – like the Desertec project, a \$550bn plan to deliver solar thermal power, energy storage, desalinated water and a regional grid to power North Africa, Europe and the Middle East. (See [www.desertec.org/](http://www.desertec.org/)) Previously president of the Club of Rome, Prince El Hassan is a founder of the Desertec project.

We have mined the sky, ocean and land of its carbon-absorption capacity, and are hitting the limit. The fundamental limit to growth, of 350 parts per million (ppm) of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, was passed in 2006. My friend Rishab Khanna, whom I met in Caux during week three at the Trust and Integrity in the Global Economy conference, is running a campaign for a global day of action on 24 October. It is a campaign for a 350 ppm target, as endorsed recently by Rajendra Pachauri, chairman of the UN International Panel on Climate Change. ([www.350.org/en](http://www.350.org/en)) I would encourage everyone to sign up to the 350 campaign and take the message to our leaders – that the current 450ppm target gives the green light to killing the Great Barrier Reef, equatorial rainforests and most large mammals, melting arctic ice causing sea levels to rise over low-

lying island nations.

The planet now sits at 383 ppm, in deep ecological debt, slaughtering species at a rate of three unique species per second. It amounts to a global annihilation on a horrific scale, which would chill our blood if we could see the last gasps for breath before our eyes, and hear the sickening silence of nature brought by eternal extinction. Such images hang heavily in the air, like the pollutants which billow from coal-fired power stations delivering the death blow to our global web of ecological and economic prosperity. Nuclear is no solution, when new fast breeder reactors produce weapons-grade waste constantly – annihilation on demand. The power humanity wields, to either destroy or nurture, has never been greater. As humanity slips into the grasp of materialism and greed, can we awake from the nightmare when we most need to?

### **A collective will for action**

Many friends were experiencing such profound transformation at Caux, with presenters and participants spiritually enriching the minds and hearts of all of us present. Their inspirational and transformative stories were gifts – stories of pain, of redemption, of change.

The calling for me was that I should continue my journey in the environmental field, to try and help bridge the world's divides with trust and integrity, empowering people and decision-makers to make the right decisions for our wounded world. In particular, it is to attend the Copenhagen global climate conference to be facilitated by the United Nations, 7-17 December, 2009, at the request of IofC leaders who saw a need for the Caux Forum for Human Security (CFHS) to respond to climate change in a definitive way, reaching out to the world's leaders.

One of the most important convergences at the CFHS was the coming together of the Environment and Economic workshop streams, facilitated by senior British journalist, Geoff Lean. This allowed the collective wisdom of the participants and

presenters – from such bodies as Chatham House, the Institute for Environmental Security, the Nicholas Stern Review and Grantham Institute at London School of Economics – to create a vision, action plan and collective will in relation to Copenhagen. And to progress the "Global Green New Deal" (like Roosevelt's New Deal in the 1930's). See [www.greennewdealgroup.org](http://www.greennewdealgroup.org)

We are now working on the Copenhagen strategy to reach leaders, decision-makers and change-makers, sharing our stories of hope, trust and integrity, listening to the voice of conscience and taking up the task to transform ourselves and this fragile planet by engaging all those who accept this call as their own.

I have been asked by the Global Humanitarian Forum (founded by Kofi Annan) Director, Martin Frick, whom I met at the Caux Forum for Human Security, to work as a representative of IofC with the World Parliament of Religions in Melbourne, to facilitate a unique video conference between the world's religious leaders and the world's political leaders, focusing on the ethical, spiritual and stewardship dimensions to climate change and the environment.

If I can raise the funding and get the necessary clearances, I will then take the message from the World Parliament of Religions directly to Copenhagen during the 10 days of the Copenhagen UN Climate Conference, where forums will be held to discuss the issues raised from which we will make video podcasts. Linking up with the IofC Environment and Economic Working Group there, we will see how to integrate these themes into future Caux Forums, hopefully providing a platform for IofC to facilitate this transformative dialogue to tip minds and hearts in a new direction, and bring new connections between leaders across the world in this time of need.

*If you support this vision for global transformation starting in Copenhagen, please email [tom.duncan7@gmail.com](mailto:tom.duncan7@gmail.com)*