

## Caux Lecture 9 August 2007

### Voice of the Voiceless: Trust building in a divided World Dr Visier Sanyü

G'day mate – we say this when we greet each other in my country Australia. But I am one of the 4.6 million or 23% of Australians born overseas. My origins are from Nagaland and when my tribe greet each other we say: "Mhacü lie temo?" which translates as "Come into my house and have food with me". This greeting says something about the culture of my people. But our neighbours the Hindus, who have developed a higher level of spirituality than us say "Namaste" when they greet each other, which means "I salute the divine you". The Jews, especially in Israel, greet each other with "shalom", and you reply "shalom". In most Christian traditions we say "peace be with you," and the reply is, "and also with you". Recently, I was told a story of a bishop who went to a very important meeting. The PA system was not working well and the Bishop was a little embarrassed, so he pointed to the mike and said "there is something wrong with this," and the congregation replied, "and also with you."

We all think there is something wrong with the other religion, the other Nation, whereas the other group may think there is something wrong with us. Many indigenous people think that there is something wrong with the rest of the world. The Nation States view indigenous people as a problem. If we are honest, we all have some elements of xenophobia in us whether we are indigenous or non indigenous, but what we often forget is that we all also have some elements of *Filoxenia* which is the opposite of xenophobia. *Filoxenia* is one who is attracted to that which is foreign, especially to foreign people, manners, or cultures. I am not trying to exhibit my knowledge of Greek to you all, but I am highlighting this love of strangers and others, which exists in every culture. I have an Uncle whose name is Sovizo, which means "he who will welcome many guests/strangers in his home". I thought it was an unusual name but we all have that side in us. People go crazy when they go to a festival where there are lots of foreign foods and cultures. People love the exotic – including indigenous cultures. This can be a starting point to built trust.

It is a unique gift to be an indigenous person. At the outset, I want to share with you my understanding of the term indigenous people. If we take the literal meaning of the word, every human being is an indigenous person somewhere and non indigenous somewhere else. Therefore this would make the German, Swiss, French, English and Chinese all indigenous people. The definition of the word means as originating or occurring naturally in a country or region. However, for want of a better term the word Indigenous is used for the nations and peoples who are colonized, marginalized, dispossessed of culture and even having a spiritual dislocation. It also refers to a philosophy of life - having a

spiritual connection with mother and father earth. Paradoxically, it is these societies who have an unbroken link with the past, a culture of respect for nature and a deep sense of spiritual awareness for the future.

The indigenous people of the world have been defeated, marginalized, displaced and suffered untold miseries. This is a fact, but indigenous people have also become a time bomb about to explode at any moment. What I mean by this is that the ill treatment of indigenous people by the Nations States has reached a point where their anger can cause harm to everyone – both indigenous and non-indigenous. It is true that we have not always been easily understood by the larger communities of the world, even by people who have good and genuine intentions to work for reconciliation. But unless the voices of the Indigenous people are heard they will become more difficult because they are angry for what they have become and rightly so.

The indigenous people who are oppressed by the European colonisers such as the Americas, known as the First Nations and the indigenous in Australia and even Europe are very different in their history, political struggles, cultural heritage and views from that of the indigenous people from Africa and Asia. Certainly the indigenous people of Asia, particularly in India, where they are still known as “tribal” have a different approach to this struggle<sup>1</sup>. Whatever the nomenclature, Indigenous people are the people without political and economic power and therefore without a voice in the decision making for shaping the future of our planet.

Our world is divided between the rich and the poor, between black and white, North and South, East and West, Muslims, Jews, Christians, Indigenous and the coloniser and the list goes on. The indigenous people must ask themselves what kind of role they are going to play in trust building in this divided world.

We are deeply concerned about climate change. Not only scientists but even the ordinary people are aware that our planet is heading for a catastrophe unless we do something to change the way we live. We are all grateful to people like Al Gore who have played a major role in educating us about this crisis. Yet how many times have you read or seen the Cree prophecy long before Al Gore? Let me remind you once again, “only after the last tree has been cut down, only after the last river has been poisoned, only after the last fish caught, only then will you find that we cannot eat money”. I am sure that most people have heard this at some point, but the world did not listen because it was the voice of the voiceless

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<sup>1</sup> There is a school of thinking, particularly in the West, that the indigenous people from Americas, Aboriginal of the Australia and Maoris are the only true First Nations of the earth. This is because the colonization of these people had been more dramatic and their stories told and written. But within the indigenous movement this is not the case. It is up to the indigenous people themselves to decide who they are and identify themselves as indigenous people. This makes the Naga or Masai as much a First Nations people as the others. Being less well known and less expressed or less quoted in popular writing does not make my own people less indigenous.

indigenous people. We cannot always afford to wait for an Al Gore appear to warn us about environmental issues.

I have lived in Australia for 11 years and I realise that I will never fully understand the ancient culture and wisdom of the Indigenous people of Australia. I also realise that I am only just beginning to have some insights into the Anglo-European culture, which is dominant in Australia.

Australia is not only a lucky country but also a blessed land. It is the great Southern land of the Holy Spirit. We have also experimented with one of the most unique forms of multiculturalism. Unlike the melting pot theory elsewhere where it appears that all the cultures evolved into one culture, in Australia everyone can practice one's own culture, speak their original language and be Australian all at the same time. Therefore, we have many Greeks and Italians in Australia that are more Greek and Italian than the people of Greece and Italy. You have Dinka Australians, Karen Australians and even a Naga Australian like me. This is based on a simple fact that no culture is superior. Cultures are simply different from one another but in Australia this noble concept of multiculturalism has come under serious threat from the present government. I am glad that our indigenous people are playing a significant role in reminding our current government that Australia became multicultural ever since the first boat people arrived from England.

## **Sorry Day**

The relationship between the Indigenous and Settlers, as you all know is a sad history of colonization. Many horrible things happened to the indigenous people. For example 'the stolen generation' witnessed the removal of aboriginal children from their parents where they were raised by white families. There was even an eradication program of Aboriginals and rabbits in Tasmania. The positive side of this story is that today a large majority of the population are sorry for the past and want reconciliation. There was a report about the stolen generation called *Bringing Them Home*. The report shocked the nation. One recommendation of the report was that a Sorry Day be held annually to commemorate the tragedy. Sir Ronald Wilson, Chair of the National Enquiry into the stolen generation, said, "It indicates understanding, a willingness to enter into the suffering, and implies a commitment to do more."<sup>2</sup> In Aboriginal English it has a further meaning: when Aboriginal people come together to grieve – usually when a death occurs – they describe this as "sorry business". So a Sorry Day would be meaningful to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. The Federal Government was not interested, but Sir Ronald consulted spokespeople for the stolen generations, and they jointly invited thirty people, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal to form a committee. This committee chose May 26 to be National Sorry Day, in a statement the committee described Sorry Day as, "a day when all Australians can express their sorrow for the whole tragic episode, and celebrate the

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<sup>2</sup> Interview for *For A Change*, London, January 1998

beginning of a new understanding.... Indigenous people will participate in a Day dedicated to the memory of loved ones who never came home, or who are still finding their way home.... Sorry Day can help restore the dignity stripped from those affected by removal; and it offers those who carried out the policy - and their successors - a chance to move beyond denial and guilt. It could shape a far more creative partnership between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, with immense benefit to both.”<sup>3</sup>

The response exceeded all expectations. Nation-wide, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians met to take action. A well-known actor created *Sorry Books* – these are manuscript books in which people could express their apology. Soon several thousand books were in circulation, and nearly a million people wrote messages, many of them telling of personal experiences which prompted them to contribute to a Sorry Book. When the day arrived, it was commemorated by thousands of events.

Why did Sorry Day touch such a chord? One of the deepest human pains is that of a mother who loses her child, or a child its mother. Yet the gulf between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians was simply too immense for even this pain to flow across it. Bringing Them Home exposed this gulf, and many Australians were shocked. Sorry Day was a chance to accept blame, and to do something about it.

The stolen generations were deeply moved. For the first time, they felt that the Australian community understood what they had gone through. The effect of this could be seen in innumerable ways.

Now, many of the stolen generations felt the way was open towards healing. From across the country many of them met together. Out of their discussions came a decision to launch a “Journey of Healing”. A prominent stolen generations woman, Lowitja O’Donoghue, became its patron.

### **Journey of Healing**

The Journey of Healing’s underlying concept is that, if the wounds are to be healed, both government and the community, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, have a vital role. It offers every Australian the chance to be part of healing this deep national wound. And many have responded.

When their local community understands the problems that stolen generations people face, some of these problems can be overcome. As a result, people who have felt alienated for years are experiencing the welcome of their local communities. In a supportive environment, they can begin to heal. The Journey of Healing has already begun.

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<sup>3</sup> NSDS National Conference

I would also like to share my own encounter with the Indigenous people of Australia. To begin a new life with a young family in a new country is very challenging. We were very grateful to be granted Australian citizenship after four years of our stay but at the same time there were mixed feelings as I felt something was incomplete without the blessings of the Indigenous people. So we requested that they welcome us to their country. Reg Blow, the Aboriginal elder performed a smoke ceremony where our family was welcomed. After that, we felt a spiritual connection to the indigenous people of the land and we still do. I continue to work with the indigenous people of Australia and every fortnight I go to the Maya Healing centre to conduct Yoga and meditation workshops. The Aboriginal people continue to help me in my own journey of healing.

The most recent debate in Australia is the issue of child sexual abuse amongst the indigenous community. The problem is of serious concern for the whole nation. Prime Minister John Howard has declared it as a **National Emergency** and has sent the army and police into Aboriginal communities to tackle this problem. This drastic action has angered many Aboriginal leaders and they see this as an election campaign tactic. Patrick Dodson, who is a prominent Aboriginal leader said, "There continues to be a wide perception in the indigenous community, and considered opinion across the nation, that the National Emergency intervention strategy is motivated by political factors in the election year. It lacks integrity."<sup>4</sup> He continues to say, "This is an Iraq-style intervention with no exit strategy or plans for long-term economic and social development." The Aboriginals are once again made voiceless in this debate and they continue to be the most disadvantaged community in Australia. The life expectancy of an indigenous person is 17 years less than the non indigenous. Also 22% of prisoners in Australia are indigenous but they make up less than 3% of Australia's population.

Gandhi was once asked what he thought of Western Civilization. He quickly replied, "I think it's a good idea". While western civilization, which dominates our planet today, is a good idea it has also fallen short of providing us with a good and safe world to live in. I am aware that Westerners are the best critics of their own civilization and I am not an authority to comment on that, as my own civilization is inadequate of providing the answers. But it is time to pause and ask whether this civilization has missed out something that is deeply indigenous, in a sense, deeply spiritual? Has it strayed too far in economic rationalism and military might? Can the Indigenous people fill the gap between the western-based civilization and a spiritual peaceful world that we all longed for? Can we truly offer an answer to the world's hunger and thirst for a spirituality that deeply satisfies so that everyone can live with dignity? Can we build a spiritual civilization?

In my part of the world there is a beautiful mountain. My people used to call it Krachüzhu. For thousands of years it was known to the Tibetan as

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<sup>4</sup> The Age July 14, 2007.

Chomolungma (pronounced Jongmalunga) but the mountain did not exist until the British army officer Andrew Waugh saw it and decided to name it after his teacher George Everest. According to Waugh, “so that it may become a word among civilized Nations”. This is how whole world knows this mountain as Mount Everest. (I am glad that you are all civilized people!!) There are numerous demonstrations of this arrogant attitude; for example, Australia was called ‘No Man’s Land’ or “Terra Nullius” because the Indigenous people were not considered then to be human by the European settlers. The list is endless in the ways this was demonstrated throughout Indigenous history. A civilization that is arrogant and that ignores the small voice will face serious consequences in the future.

As an indigenous person I would like to share some journeys of indigenous people. Search for God, pursuit of enlightenment and of a higher spiritual life is not unique to the indigenous people. But because the indigenous are deprived of political and economic powers and because of their history of displacement and dislocation, it becomes even more urgent and pertinent than other communities to seek something higher than themselves. In other words, there is always a deep search for spirituality among the indigenous people. The unbroken link with the past in their culture and their close relationship with nature and the land is a factor that helps them. This is an area where the indigenous people can play a unique role in building trust in this divided world.

It is in our human nature to create God in our own image. We manipulate God and contextualize our religion to suit our own culture and our own ideology. At the end of our search we reach a fundamental point, which assumes that “I am right and all other religions and views are wrong”. This is the problem in our world today, entrenched fundamentalism.

We are all deeply concerned by the rise of terrorism. It is a complex issue with many theories and opinions by the experts. We are horrified when Muslim **Al-Qaeda** kills innocent people. We are sad when the soldiers of Christian George Bush and John Howard kill innocent people. But there seems to be some justification in that killing. For example, we went into war to help the Iraqi people and in the process some innocent people were killed. And we went to Afghanistan to get rid of the Taliban so that Afghans could live in a civilized society. These are some the justifications given for killing innocent people, yet we continue to say that we cannot understand the mind of the terrorists. We cannot understand the horror of suicide bombers nor how people can be so full of hate that they are ready to blow themselves up. As an indigenous person one aspect of this complexity is quite clear and we understand why the other side is fighting for their voice. Legal sanctions blind many and as long as we justify some form of killing and condemn another form of killing, we will not be able to understand the mind of a terrorist.

We are perplexed as to how a person can kill in the name of God. When I was a child, our village teacher told us many ancient stories and mythologies. One such story was about a good man, a righteous man. His name was Abraham (Recently a Jewish friend told me that the Ham was added by the Christians as they really like pork, but that he was actually named Abram). Growing up I learned that Abraham was the spiritual father of three important religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In this story there is a part where God asked Abraham to kill his son. As Abraham was faithful and obedient he was ready to sacrifice his own son and you all know that this did not happen. But the question here is, does that send a message to the extremists who are ready to kill in the name of God? Are the fundamentalists so "God intoxicated" that they are ready to kill in the name of God? As an indigenous person, if God were to ask me to kill my son for his names' sake I would tell that God that I would certainly not do that.

There must be a better way, a peaceful solution to stop conflict. In fact there are many ways to bring peace. Let me share with you one aspect of my work with refugees.

### **The Refugee Healing Trail**

As a refugee worker, I have developed a program called Refugee Healing Trail - Refugees Finding New Dreams with Us. It is a program where a group of refugees go to an Australian country town for a weekend. They are hosted by Australian families. They share their stories - their dreams, hopes and feelings of angst at starting a new life in Australia; the traumas of fleeing conflicts and wars in their country of origin, living in refugee camps and detention centers and seeking asylum in Australia. These experiences and stories create the Refugee Healing Trail. The experience includes a public function where the community can come together to hear the refugees' stories and see their dances, hear their songs and share their cultures. But more importantly the host families and refugees develop compassion and a deeper friendship which helps create a healthy multicultural society in Australia.

For refugees the end of the journey is often the beginning of another journey. After the initial jubilation and celebration when accepted by Australia, the refugees face a deep cultural shock as they settle down in the community. A sense of deep loneliness and desperation grips them beyond their anticipation, everything is new and strange. And they become mute. Some even miss the miserable refugee camps where they had spent many years but are too polite to express these emotions as they are expected to be grateful for their wonderful life now. For them, it is not simply a change of country it is also a cultural and spiritual dislocation. The Refugee Healing Trail is a way to help these brave people start new lives.

The most common remark from the people who hosted the Healing Trail is that it was healing for them to care for refugees. In the last Healing Trail in June this year a school teacher who kept two refugees in her home wrote, "The entire weekend was such an uplifting experience for me. I was overwhelmed by their gratefulness, the positive outlook and love they are willing to give. They want for so little. It really was a life changing experience. It is no longer a story I can distance myself from. They are unique individuals with so much to offer. They have helped me put my life into perspective. I now know that my problems are so small and incidental. We really have nothing to worry about in comparison to what these refugees have encountered. I shall never forget this weekend for as long as I live."<sup>5</sup>

One of the first refugees who took part in the Refugee Healing Trail was David Vincent Nyuol, a Dinka from Sudan. He left his village when he was three due to the war and for 19 years lived in Kakuma refugee camp as one of the lost boys. A few months after his arrival in Australia he attended a Healing Trail. After the trip he told me that the experience was one the happiest trips in his life. Later I invited him to do a course with Initiatives of Change called Life Matters. The course gave him hope and inspiration for his people. David started with his friends a North /South Sudanese Youth Dialogue in Australia to bring reconciliation between the North and South Sudanese. He has since then returned to Sudan twice and has met his mother after 22 years and his father after 20 years. He also visited Caux last year. These young Sudanese are organizing a conference of reconciliation in Sudan in 2008.

Australia has been enriched by the presence of refugees, as they become part of the Australian story. Five out of eight billionaires in Australia are people whose families came to Australia as refugees.<sup>6</sup> The presence of refugees in our midst challenges us to create an Australia that is caring and compassionate. The spiritual health of a nation depends on how strangers and those who speak with a small voice are welcomed into the community.

Let us look at an indigenous voice and where the indigenous way of peace making has been inspiring.

### **The Khonoma Public Commission**

As I said earlier, originally I come from Nagaland. Naga are indigenous people that occupy the frontier of India and Burma. Under British colonial rule, the country Nagaland was divided between India and Burma. Although this is a common phenomenon of British colonialism it was very traumatic in the case of the Naga people. The palace of the chief of Longwa in Nagaland was divided in such a way that his kitchen went to Burma and his bedroom went to India. In

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<sup>5</sup> Rose Lee, School teacher from Sale

<sup>6</sup> Peter Mares, Boreline, Sydney, UNSW Press Book ,2002.p2

1947, the Naga National Council declared Nagaland independent from Britain a day before India's Independence Day, but both India and Britain ignored this and India invaded Nagaland after the British left the subcontinent.

Gandhi promised the Nagas that they will have their independence but sadly he was soon assassinated.

We have fought for our independence from India and Burma for the last 60 years since the British left the subcontinent of India. In this war we lost some 150,000 thousands lives. But in our struggle many things went wrong and our revolution began to devour its own children. In the process every family in Nagaland has been affected in one way or another. The national movement splintered into four factions in the 80s and by early 90s factional fights and fratricide became a daily scene.

A.Z Phizo, the father of the Naga nation was born in my village and my village Khonoma made significant sacrifices for our independence movement. But very early on in the movement divisions emerged. Mistrust and hatred led to the loss of many lives.

One of our most prominent leaders, Sakhrie, was the man who gave the intellectual ideology to our independence movement. He was killed because the militant group felt that he was compromising our stand of total sovereignty. But his murder in turn was the trigger that marked an escalation of revenge and divisions within families and clans. Mistrust and bitterness grew amongst our people. It took 50 long and painful years for our villagers to come to the point of reconciliation. Last year all the clans of Khonoma unitedly erected a monolith to commemorate Sakhrie's death anniversary as a symbol of the healing and reconciliation that has taken place.

This peace process did not come easily. It took years of dedication, a willingness to bring peace and some indigenous methods of settling disputes. Key to this process was Niketu Iralu who has worked with Initiatives of Change in many countries. He returned to our village some years ago to work for reconciliation as he was deeply disturbed by the killings in Nagaland. With the village elders and the youth the village formed the Khonoma Public Commission.

The role of the commission was to deliberate on the issues and on the wrongs, hurts and misunderstandings that have produced distrust resentment and divisions in the village. Guided by the truth of history that "hurts not transformed are always transferred", the Commission extended its assistance wherever there was a need to forgive or be forgiven, for closure, and to create mutual goodwill as a result of restitutions made, accepted or reciprocated.

The people of Khonoma expressed their prayer and longing for inner healing and liberation so that her sons and daughters might grow to God's fullest stature for

each one of them. The Commission members accepted the task given to them pledging to rise above motivations for personal or clan advantage so that the truth and the greater good of the village might prevail.

The task was to resolve yesterday's wounds to bring healings to enable today's generation to build a better tomorrow. "We must be able to remember sufficiently the pain of the past, so that it can safely be forgotten"<sup>7</sup> Given the moral and spiritual nature of the task of the Commission, all its members were required to be committed to Khonoma achieving together what is right and best for all before God and man. Believing in the utmost importance of the gift of healing the Commission declared their humble commitment to God and to one another to pursue the common objective, trusting in the power of God to guide them and to change what has gone wrong in our village starting with the commission members.

The Commission members made numerous journeys and visits to facilitate sensitive connections and honest interactions between individuals and the clans, in the space and atmosphere of trust and confidence. Heartfelt apologies were made for wounds inflicted during some of the most difficult years of the Naga struggle. Bitterness, doubts, fears, guilt and regrets held onto for years were expressed and heard. Mutual forgiveness and understanding thus became the liberating experience of all brought to God in equal need of His grace and blessing to start afresh.

The Commission gave sufficient time and opportunity for reviews of all the cases and grievances were heard several times.

The Commission identified 22 killings. They helped the estranged families and clans to meet and listen to one another for the larger interest of our people. Gradually, those whose side had caused wounds asked for forgiveness. Those wounded graciously forgave, resulting in the beginning of healing and reconciliation after many years.

The Commission concluded that:

The Naga struggle was the natural, honorable response of the Naga people to the wide-ranging changes taking place in the world around them. That their struggle for independence was not a mistake but the methods taken had not been well thought and examined.

Mistakes were also caused under serious pressure by the Indian army as the army went all out to crush the Naga movement and occupy our land.

Finally, the Commission appeals to the people of Khonoma that differences or disputes arising in the future are not allowed to turn us away from one another

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<sup>7</sup> Bishop George Browning , IofC Conference Melbourne 2007

and thereby weaken us, because they are meant to make us stronger by our willingness to discover and rise together to what is right and best for all.

The search for reconciliation within Khonoma was launched with an observance of Naga indigenous ritual and prayer day by observing silence, “turning the searchlight inward” to discover where one or one’s side has been wrong in order to make a start. The day started with the whole village remaining silent for 3 minutes as soon as a sign was given at 6 am. A letter went to all the people of Khonoma living away from home that the time of silence on that day was to be used to listen to one’s conscience to examine where one has been wrong and not on where others had been wrong. Our village elder Sebi later said that he was so struck by the completeness of the silence that morning. In his own words “even the animals became aware that something was happening. They went away to hide themselves. The silence moved me deeply and I felt God had come down to our village”.

Referring to the Khonoma Public Commission, Niketu said, “a unique opportunity was given to the people of Khonoma to take a calm, honest look at what had been whispering in the bottom of their hearts that had been causing dissatisfaction in their souls and kept our people tentative and distrustful. The mutual resentment towards one another had seriously reduced the capacity of the village to face the rapid changes the world started to bring to them”.

What renders us voiceless? What depth of silence is required within the clamoring voices of this civilization that we can learn to listen to the whisper within our hearts which calls us to humaneness and dignity?

In conclusion let me share my own journey in this story. I was born and brought up in Khonoma village. When I was six my village was burnt down by the Indian army and we lived in the jungle for three years. We survived on wild vegetables and meat from wild animals, including monkeys. My brother became a Captain in the Naga army and went to Pakistan to obtain arms. He was later arrested and went to prison. My father as the village chief was tortured and arrested many times. Like all the other Nagas life was very deplorable in those days. Later I was educated in some of the best institutions in India and I became the Head of the History Department in Nagaland University.

In 1996 at the height of factional fighting, I left Nagaland and moved to Australia with my wife and three children; our youngest son turned five the day we arrived. My wife Pari and my daughter Visopiano are with me today. Two months after I left Nagaland my colleague in the University was assassinated and my friend was shot in his own house. War and oppression create many types of casualties and people suffer in many different ways, such as in drug abuse, poverty, dysfunctional families, mistrust, corruption, sexual abuse, mental illness and so on. Since we left Nagaland I have lost two brothers and four nephews. One brother died of cancer and the other brother died of alcoholism. One nephew

died of alcoholism, one of drugs and two have died from AIDS. For me, like many indigenous people life could be a daily battle, but I am grateful to God that I met the idea of Initiatives of Change in my school days. And as a result of this long association I have assimilated IofC culture of "Quiet Time" into my own spirituality and belief system, this has enabled me to be free from bitterness and hatred.

My story is not a unique story but just a part of the whole scenario as all the Naga families have experienced the same fate in our struggle. There are many orphans in Nagaland who have witnessed their own parents killed in front of them.

Indigenous people have a deep spirituality. I also consider myself to be a spiritual person but recently an encounter with a non-indigenous person deeply shook my belief system. I have a great respect for a Professor of Theology, an Anglo Australian who has previously taught me. He is a compassionate, caring and an understanding man. He is truly a guru and a holy man. Whilst organizing a conference a little misunderstanding arose and I felt that he was not honest in one area and I shared this with him. He responded with integrity and genuinely apologized for his mistake. I could see from his eyes that he meant what he said. After this incident I was in the lift on my way to my office and I noticed that my hands were shaking. His graciousness had deeply touched me. This experience taught me that I have often taken a short cut or the easy way of doing things or I do the wrong things and give the flimsy excuse that it's an indigenous way of doing things and expect other people to understand me because I am an Indigenous person. But if we want to contribute our wisdom and our spirituality to the rest of the world we must be honest first with ourselves and do things the right way which is not always easy. Other nations and people have done the wrong things to us but we also do the wrong things to ourselves.

I am reminded of my first encounter with the idea of Initiatives of Change when my friend Kolezo was able to forgive the people who were responsible for the death of his brother. His words still ring true today. He said, "I have been too sensitive to how much others have hurt me but forgotten how much I have hurt others. If I have the courage to kill a man why can't I also have the courage to love him enough to make him a different man?"

I believe in the survival of the Naga people. In spite of the powerlessness and all the injustices done to us, we have never failed to rise up again and again. The dynamics and splendor of our culture must survive for the good of humanity. Our loss will be the world's loss too. No doubt we have to critically and wisely examine ourselves as we are our own greatest enemies but our voice must be heard and it should not remain mute.

I conclude with a prayer to the indigenous female God of my tribe Ukepenuopfü. About the period when Buddha was receiving the enlightenment, at the time

when the prophets in Israel were receiving great inspiration and wisdom from God, our people were also finding and discovering their own God. It was a female God, not a goddess. When the missionaries came to our land they made her into a male God and in translating Jehovah used her as the equivalent. So today we have a female God who is a male.

**O Ukepenuopfü,**

You have given birth to the human race  
All the living creatures of the Earth  
All the plants and the trees  
Help me to care for them and treat them as my brothers and sisters

Bless my clan and my village  
Provide me with plenty of rice to eat and wine to drink  
So that I can perform the Feast of Merit for my clan and village  
And help me to make the whole world my clan and my village

You speak to me in my dreams and in my heart  
You give direction for my daily life

Help me to breathe in love and exhale fear from within me

Hold my hands in my journey, as I am afraid to take the step alone

Make my hands clean and my heart pure

Make me free and strong

So that I can help my brother to carry his basket across the river

Ukepenuopfü help us create a world full with spiritual people

May we live in total harmony with you

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