



'Sorry books' help Kenyans reconcile



Signing the 'Sorry Book'

A workshop for reconciliation, hosted and coordinated by the Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Kenya, took place in September in the country's Burnt Forest area, with support from Initiatives of Change.

The four-day workshop, involving 70 people, was invited by leaders of the local Kikuyu and Kalenjin communities. Burnt Forest is in Kenya's Rift Valley Province and has a

long history of violence between the two tribes. An earlier workshop took place in May 2008 in response to the post-election violence which hit Kenya at the beginning of the year.

The communities invited Nigerians Imam Muhammad Ashafa and Pastor James Wuye to help with the workshop because 'they speak out of their experiences'. Ashafa and Wuye had led rival armed militias in the violence which rocked northern Nigeria during the 1990s. Since reconciled, the two men now lead task-forces to resolve conflicts across the country.

On the last day of the workshop, the elders led a peace march around a new joint market for the two communities ending at the newly established Peace Office. There a special 'Sorry Book' was opened giving those who had engaged in violence a chance to confess their wrongs anonymously, along with comments and suggestions on how to forge reconciliation.

Both the Kikuyu and the Kalenjin community elders signed and danced outside the office. 'When people see life in spiritual terms, they can really tune in to the power of God and get a positive response,' reports Wambui Ngyuo. 'It's a question of redirecting peoples' spiritual energy.'

Sierra Leone's leaders build trust

The first of eight dialogues for members of parliament and paramount chiefs was launched on 3 October by Sierra Leone's Vice-President, the Hon. Chief Samuel Sam-Sumana. The dialogues are being run by Hope-Sierra Leone (H-SL), an NGO affiliated to IofC-International, with funding from the United Nations Development Programme. Addressing the 100 plus MPs in Freetown's Parliament Building, the Vice-President said: 'The most urgent moral challenge the nation faces today is to heal the bitterness of the past and create the conditions necessary for reconciliation.' He ended by asking his audience to bear in mind that: 'When people listen, God speaks; when people obey, God acts; when people change, nations change.'

Following the launch, a group of 13 MPs from the three main political parties participated in the first dialogue at a hotel in East Freetown. Over two-and-a-half days, the MPs shared rooms, ate and laughed together, irrespective of political affiliations, ethnicity or religious beliefs. A 'tripartite' team of facilitators drawn from serving members of the police, army and the teaching profession helped the MPs to deliberate on issues such as standing against corruption, the search for moral values, trust building, teamwork and political tolerance.



GLADYS KPUKUNU

MPs from opposing parties share experiences

The dialogues received extensive media coverage on television and radio. One of the MPs interviewed said that the dialogue had 'improved their thoughts' on development and political tolerance.

A second dialogue took place a week later in Freetown, followed by a third in the strategic town of Bo in Southern Province. Over the next two months a further five dialogues will take place in key centres across the country.

News in Brief

Between hunger and surplus



Food conference delegates enjoying local Italian fare

Genetic engineering, fair trade, pesticides and health, the environment and world hunger: behind our plate of food is a hidden world to think about. From 9–12 October, farmers, consumers and scientists from 11 European countries did just that, meeting in the Italian city of Castel San Pietro, near Bologna. The current world food system was described as ‘rotten’ because it produces both surpluses and hunger and is unsustainable. ‘A new international policy is needed to feed six billion mouths,’ said former Italian Senator, Giovanni Bersani. Claude Bourdin from IofC’s International Farmers’ Dialogue observed that ‘food is not the same as trade... an agricultural policy should not be a matter of economics, but of morals.’ The conference was a joint initiative of IofC Italy, Pace Adesso (an Italian peace organization) and CEFA (European Committee for Training and Agriculture).

Faith – a creative source of peace

Mohamed Sahnoun, President of Initiatives of Change International, was the keynote speaker on 1 October for a national ‘prayer lunch’ in the Swiss Capital, Bern, presided over by Swiss President Pascal Couchpin and attended by some 100 parliamentarians and staff. The theme was ‘Faith – a creative source of peace’. Sahnoun called for the creation of a global movement bringing people together for change. ‘Humanity cannot avoid change, a change that must start with each one of us, and which implies challenging ourselves, an apprenticeship in listening, and a faith that is constantly nurtured.’ He invited all the participants to join him in the Caux Forum for Human Security, in creating and promoting such a movement.

Harambee leadership training

Chapel Hill, at the foot of South Africa’s Magaliesberg mountain range, was the

venue for a distinctly African form of leadership training which ran through September and October. *Harambee* is a Swahili word meaning ‘working together for a common purpose’. The 19 participants from seven African countries and India took part in workshops on themes such as effective communication, authentic African leadership and healing the family. At the end of the initial 12-day training, Tsitsi Katito, from Zimbabwe said it had been ‘a positive eye opener’ and a time of ‘self re-discovery’. He and others then commenced a six-week outreach programme around South Africa ‘to share our various stories of change and hope for the great continent of Africa’.

Gandhi in Paris

Rajmohan and Usha Gandhi spent a week in Paris, 28 September to 3 October, for the launching of the French version of Rajmohan’s biography of his grandfather: *Gandhi, sa véritable histoire par son petit-fils* (Gandhi, his true story by his grandson). They were guests of publisher Buchet-Chastel and of IofC France. Gandhi spoke to 120 people and signed books in the main shop of France’s largest bookstore chain. He also addressed academics at the Maison des Sciences Humaines, was interviewed by various radio and print journalists, and had lunch with members of parliament and senators.

An evening at the French IofC centre in Issy-les-Moulineaux drew 70 guests for a lively discussion on the Mahatma’s relevance today, covering terrorism, Pakistan, Kashmir and the West’s relationship with the Muslim world. ‘Gandhi’s spirit is relevant for today and can still have an impact on our world. What is needed is commitment. If I act truly and deeply in accordance with my conscience and my ideas, I continue to carry Gandhi’s message,’ said Rajmohan.

Action for Life begins

Lining the edge of a plateau to greet the rising sun over the Krishna Valley, an intergenerational group of 32 people from 16 countries opened the 4th Action for Life programme, which aims to ‘develop a new generation of change makers’ who follow Gandhi’s motto of ‘be the change you want to see in the world’. Their 30-week journey through Asia began with a month’s intensive training at the IofC centre in Panchgani, India in October.

Caux report available

A 16-page colour report of the 2008 Caux Conferences and a four-page report of the first Caux Conference for Human Security are now available from major IofC centres.

CALENDAR

AUSTRALIA

24 October–14 November
The Imam and the Pastor down-
under, see
www.au.iofc.org/imam-pastor

RICHMOND, USA

6 November
Metropolitan Richmond Day

27 February–8 March
Connecting Communities
Trustbuilding Program

KENYA

5–10 December
East African Farmers’ Dialogue

CAUX, SWITZERLAND

26 December–1 January
Winter conference: ‘Europe –
Responsibility, Hope, Future’

CAUX, SWITZERLAND

9 July–12 August
International conferences on
Trust and Integrity for a
Sustainable World
See www.caux.ch/2009

PANCHGANI, INDIA

7–10, 12–15 January
4–7, 25–28 February
22–25 April
20–23 May
10–13 June
Heart of Effective Leadership
courses for business and industry

GLOBAL UPDATE is published every two months by Initiatives of Change International, Rue de Varembe, 1, CH 1211 Geneva 20, Switzerland. Email: ia-secretariat@iofc.org Readers are encouraged to photocopy and distribute it. Please send news/comments to: IofC Communications, Asia Plateau, Panchgani, Maharashtra 412 805 India, or to globalupdate@iofc.org. Free email subscriptions are available by writing to the same address, or through www.iofc.org.





PEOPLE BUILDING TRUST

Pioneers of the refugee healing trail
From Nagaland to Melbourne. From facing tigers in the jungle to Aboriginal smoking ceremonies, by way of the Refugee Healing Trail. Mike Lowe talks to Visier and Pari Sanyü.

Tall and dignified, Visier Sanyü has just returned from a week in Tasmania, Australia's southernmost state, where he has been talking to churches, schools and a conference of Catholic priests, about refugees. It is the third time his work with the Victorian Council of Churches has taken him there in his role as education and advocacy officer on behalf of refugees and displaced persons. Any doubts about his effectiveness are dispelled when a church minister tells him 'I use your stuff all the time'. The minister particularly likes Visier's prediction that in 20–30 years' time the Australian basketball team will largely consist of Sudanese – Australia's latest wave of immigrants – because they are so tall and naturally athletic. In this sports-obsessed nation, things like that count.

'I realize now that my problems are so small compared to these refugees'

Visier first came to Australia in 1996 with his wife Pari and three small children as a visiting academic from violence-torn Nagaland in North-East India. Three months later, the person who had taken over Visier's position back home as college

dean was assassinated. Then a close friend was shot dead in his house. Fearing for their own safety, the Sanyüs felt compelled to apply to stay in Australia. Only in Melbourne's quiet suburbs did the trauma of what they had lived through hit them. 'I had nightmares for seven years,' says Visier. He pulls out a photo of his older brothers' children – two daughters and five sons. Only one of the boys is still alive. Pari comments, 'the whole population is traumatized, but it is suppressed. The alcohol abuse and drug-taking is all part of that. So many nephews have died that way. In my mind they are victims of conflict just as much as those who are shot.'

As a child between the ages of six and nine, Visier spent three years in the jungle, along with thousands of others internally displaced from their villages. 'We starved, living under trees, eating snakes and monkeys.' He remembers a time when a tiger came and his father covered their faces telling them to keep very still. The tiger went away. In Nagaland when people recall such things they usually laugh, but when Visier retold the story recently to an Australian audience he broke down in tears as he re-lived the experience.



Such tears are a part of the healing process. In his work Visier has pioneered a 'Refugee Healing Trail' which takes recently arrived refugees to communities in rural Victoria. After an evening of performing songs and dances from their countries of origin and telling their stories, they are taken to stay in family homes. Friendships are formed – sometimes leading to resettlement. The surprising thing, says Visier, is that the hosts find it healing too. One, a teacher, said 'I realize now that my problems are so small compared to these refugees'.

For refugee workers, resettlement is always a last resort. 'If you were to ask people in the refugee camps, 99% would prefer to go back home.' The churches and other agencies recognize that it is better to deal with the roots of the problem, which means diplomacy and conflict prevention.

For Pari this finds expression through her work with IofC's Creators of Peace programme, and particularly through women's peace circles, which she helped pilot. 'I remember around the time of 9/11 becoming aware how isolated the Muslim community was. A Muslim lady I had met told how she was racially abused while driving to the hospital to give birth. So as a personal response I decided to run a peace circle in Melbourne.' Over a period of weeks the women workshop through set material. 'We share very deeply about things such as grief, loss, or struggle. Opportunities to do this across diversity are rare. In telling our stories and through deep inner listening, we are able to create an on-going new story.' An important aspect of the Circles is preventive diplomacy: 'building networks of trust and friendship which go deep enough so that if trouble erupts the relationships are sustained.'

'Suffering is what allows us to enlarge our hearts through compassion'

What do they miss about Nagaland? Family and friends, naturally, but also the deep sense of connection between people which is so strong in their culture. For Pari this finds particular expression in the rituals of mourning. 'When someone dies, even if it is the middle of the night, no effort is spared to inform friends, relatives and neighbours at once. Just as Christianity binds us to God through the suffering of Christ, so suffering is what allows us to enlarge our hearts through compassion. The rituals of mourning facilitate a sense of community and relationship in a way which is quite absent here.'



Chin refugees on the healing trail

The Naga, like Australia's Aborigines, are an indigenous people. In 1993, International Year for the World's Indigenous Peoples, Visier spoke on behalf of the Asian delegation to the United Nations. He is also a co-founder and honorary president of the World Foundation for the Safeguard of Indigenous Cultures. So it was natural for the Sanyüs to have an Aboriginal Elder hold a traditional smoking ceremony in their new home. They also have a letter inviting them 'to stay in Australia as long as they like' from Auntie Joy Murphy, Elder of the Wurundjeri people, traditional owners of the land where the Sanyüs live. 'It gives a sense of legitimacy to our being here, a real sense of welcome and belonging.'

'We talk a lot about reconciliation between Aboriginal and white Australians, but reconciliation is needed at many levels,' says Pari. 'Every new migrant should understand what has gone on before.' It is something she talks about on the Refugee Healing Trail. 'Whenever I meet Aboriginal people I'm struck by their resilience and hospitality,' she says. 'It is something that moves me to tears.'

Pari works as a social worker and coordinator of volunteers for Camcare, providing services to underprivileged, mostly white, families. 'Most people think of multiculturalism as white "Anglos" reaching out to people with brown skins. But what I am doing is just as much multicultural work,' she says.

When the Sanyüs moved into their present home they were welcomed by Barbara, a friendly neighbour bringing them food and helping to unload. Then on their first night a brick was thrown through their window by someone objecting to their race. 'So which Australia do I choose?' asks Visier, 'Barbara or the brick thrower? We chose both because both are realities.'