



Young Tibetans in search of global vision

On the eve of the 50th anniversary of the Dalai Lama's flight into exile on 10 March, Kalon Tripa (prime minister of the Tibetan government in exile) told 108 young Tibetans they have a responsibility to the whole of humanity.

'You are part of a special people with a special responsibility to preserve and promote an ancient Buddhist wisdom,' said Professor Samdhong Rinpoche, giving the keynote address for a five-day conference on 'Global vision for young Tibetans' in Asia Plateau, the IofC centre in India, mid-February.

'The Tibetan issue is not an issue of human rights only. It is an issue of civilization,' said Rinpoche. 'An ancient civilization that is still intact and fresh is being threatened... You can only preserve a civilization by living it, by transmitting it. Modernity and tradition seem to contradict, but actually tradition is tested by modernity.'

Geshe Lhakdor, director of the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, took the challenge further. 'When you complain that your culture is being destroyed, what are you doing to live it in this free land, India?' asked the former interpreter and religious assistant to the Dalai Lama. 'Young Tibetans have to nurture this culture not because it is "ours", but because it is relevant in our world today. There is no other way for the world than peace and non-violence.'

Nevertheless, the new generation of Tibetans at the conference – mostly born and educated in India – vigorously debated non-violence, along with other issues such as



Professor Samdhong Rinpoche with Tibetan youth

advancing one's career and success, honesty in relationships, and English versus Tibetan language education. By the end of the week, at least one third of them were standing up to make commitments to forgiving and forgiveness, surrendering hatreds, working for peace, and advancing their Tibetan culture and community.

The conference was hosted by Empowering the Vision, a Delhi-based NGO which aims 'to help Tibetan youth become self-reliant, dynamic and contributing members of the community', and was supported by the Asia Plateau community.

Indian public servants bringing basic changes

India's Chief Vigilance Commissioner thinks British rule in India gave the country effective systems of governance, 'put in place to maximize their gains as colonial masters'. But eventually, says Commissioner Pratayush Sinha, 'greed took over and led to the collapse of their rule'.

Speaking at a five-day conference on 'Ethics in public governance', Sinha drew the same lesson for 27 senior bureaucrats. Today, 'corruption is perceived to be endemic... more so at the cutting edge of public delivery systems. This is, in fact, a "tax on the poor"... We are a privileged lot who have the opportunity to be fair and just in resolving intractable issues.'

This was the third such programme for officers from the elite Indian Administrative Services (IAS) at Asia Plateau in Panchgani.

What makes this programme unusual is that instead of lectures and debates the bureaucrats were expected to introspect. Corporate trainer Kiran Gandhi used the example of industrial pioneer Jamshedji Tata, who was known to have

spent one hour daily in silence. 'Silence lowers the decibels, recalibrates values, bringing clarity of thought, inner peace, harmony and good decisions.'

And what do these officers make of this approach? Feedback is highly positive. A managing director of a power distribution system with 40,000 employees has put nearly 300 executives and engineers through IofC programmes. He was known for blasting those under him. Last month he told managers (including some serving under him) how his abrasive nature had changed so much that his secretary had started revealing files previously hidden because of mistakes contained in them. He spoke with candour on steps he had taken to mend his family relationships.

A chief development officer, responsible for hundreds of villages in Uttar Pradesh, says he experienced a 'total life-change' at one of these conferences. Nine of his public service cadre have been murdered confronting corruption and he feared the same fate. 'Due to the mercy of God and training at Panchgani, I have lost my fear of death,' he said. Since his visit, he has put five corrupt local officers behind bars.

News in Brief

Life Matters



Life Matters participants learn about Aboriginal culture from Reg Blow

In Melbourne, Australia, the 18th Life Matters course was held at the Australia Pacific Centre for Initiatives of Change. The course aims to help young people find a purpose and a path for life. Interactive sessions, in which participants ask deep questions of themselves, are combined with a chance to learn from the experience of individuals and groups who are making a difference. The 19 participants came from around Australia and the Asia Pacific region and included students, young workers, teachers and others in professional life.

Among them was Emmanuel Aliba Kiiza, Prime Minister of the ancient Kingdom of Bunyoro–Kitara, part of modern-day Uganda, who said that the course had 'exceeded his expectations'. He plans to develop similar programmes in his homeland. Stanley Vutiande from the Solomon Islands came for training because his government has requested that he organize, with IofC, further reconciliation workshops for some of the victims and perpetrators of the civil unrest of some years ago.

Breaking barriers in Kashmir

A series of two-day workshops on 'Breaking walls, building bridges' took place in Jammu and Kashmir in February, organized by Initiatives of Change, Kashmir, and the Indo Global Social Service Society. Although many NGOs have run dialogues bringing people from the troubled region together, this was the first time the initiative was taken by an organization within Kashmir. Participants included students, scholars and young professionals from all parts of the state. The workshops aimed to develop a culture of tolerance, acceptance

of differences and creating space for each other. Discussions on the issues facing Jammu and Kashmir touched on the plurality of identities and the common misunderstandings and stereotypes held about people from different faiths. Games were introduced to enable participants to better understand each other's perspectives and the sufferings of the 'other'.

Moldovan schools programme

New Civilization, the IofC NGO in Moldova, has been running a programme for schools to encourage young people to review their life values, to strengthen ethical behaviour and to reflect on daily decisions. About 80 young people aged 14-16 attended three-hour weekend sessions on 'Values in life', 'Communication as a tool for change' and 'Teambuilding and leadership'. The team also worked with a school at Doroțcaia which partners a nearby school in the break away Transnistria region. Students from both schools took part after a session on communication aroused their interest. As one student said, 'We are almost one school and do not know each other'. Comments after the training included, 'Values like trust, honesty, courage and purpose are the most useful things in life to follow' and 'I learned to be able to trust people, to help them any time regardless of who they are and how different they might be.'

Father of the House

A book launch of *Father of the House*, the memoirs of the late Kim Edward Beazley, took place on 11 February in the Australian Federal Parliament. As Minister for Education 1972-75, Beazley was responsible for some of the most enduring reforms of the Whitlam Labor Government. The occasion was held in the Labor Caucus Room which was packed with many government members and senators, ministers, the Speaker of the House, the President of the Senate, and family, including son Kim Christian Beazley, the recent Labor leader (before Kevin Rudd). Giving the main address, Senator John Faulkner spoke of the 'central role' that Moral Re-Armament (as IofC was then known) played in Beazley's life and the 'enormous impact it had on his political views and in the way he conducted himself'.

CALENDAR

KRYNYCHKY, UKRAINE

5-9 March

International Farmers' Dialogue

MVOLYÉ, CAMEROON

13-18 April

Youth Forum

CAUX, SWITZERLAND

International Conferences

see www.caux.ch/2009

9-15 July

Learning to Live in a Multicultural World

and

Leading Change for a Sustainable World

17-22 July

Caux Forum for Human Security

24-29 July

Trust and Integrity in the Global Economy – a people-focused approach to globalization

9-15 August

Tools for Change – learning to be peacemakers

SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

30 Sept – 4 October

Creators of Peace, international conference

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.





Carole Khakula (centre) with Mushtaq from India, Song-Hee from Korea and Biplab from India at an institute for development for women in Gujarat.

PEOPLE BUILDING TRUST

Action for Life

Learning to be change-makers and trust-builders, young people from 11 countries spread out across Asia.

Carole Khakula from Kenya is one of them:

Professor Bandukwala seemed weary but resolute. Thrice his home had been ransacked and thrice he had landed in prison for his efforts on behalf of his community. 'Muslims in Gujarat live in a state of fear,' he told us. 'This alienation is dangerous.'

Years ago, the retired nuclear physicist returned from America with a commitment to bridge the gap between the minority Muslim community and Hindus in his home state. In 2002, religious riots ripped through Gujarat. Hindu pilgrims, returning from the sacred city of Ayodhya, where in 1992 militants had razed the Babri Masjid mosque, provoked Muslims on the journey. As they neared their destination, their railway car was set on fire and 58 Hindus were burned alive. For several days, some 10,000 Hindus rampaged through Ahmedabad, looting and torching homes. Approximately 2,000 Muslims died there and across Gujarat.

'To bring change in our society we should use the language of the people, which mostly is religion'

Since then, many like Bandukwala have committed themselves to restoring these relationships, as well as what was lost in the Muslim community. He established the Zidni Imla Charitable Trust to bring quality education to Muslims in Gujarat.

This was but one of many encounters with people building trust, that those of us on the Action for Life programme have experienced during the past four months as we wove in and out of the different states across India. Others in this unique IofC programme learned about non-violence from Tibetan Buddhists in Dharamsala, home of the Dalai Lama in north India, while another group met those working for reconciliation and justice among tribal people in north-east India on the borders with Burma and China. In south India, a group found themselves interacting with orphans whose parents had died from AIDS or who had been abandoned.

Action for Life (AFL) is an IofC leadership training programme that aims to develop change-makers for the 21st century, equipped with integrity and faith, and committed to transformation in the world by starting with themselves. Now on its fourth seven-month course, it uses a combination of interactive training and experiential fieldwork to expand the capacity of each participant. Distinctively, the 21 participants and 14 staff come from different generations, nations and faiths, forming a diverse learning community which aims to demonstrate how our globalized world could live together – to 'be the change you want to see in the world', in Gandhi's words.

Most of the participants are already part of trust-building initiatives in their own countries. The AFL experience continues to add value to their vision as they





The Action for Life 2009 group

gather a myriad of skills and learning to take home.

Mushtaq Mohamed Malla is challenged by Professor Bandukwala's story of persecution, as he reflects on his own situation in conflict-torn Kashmir. Together with young social workers and lawyers in the IofC Kashmir team, he has already embarked on a road of finding non-violent solutions, and he questions what more he could do. Even though conflict is the biggest problem, he believes that other problems – if given enough focus – could be critical to any solution: tackling massive corruption, individualism, the decline of moral standards, a loss of brotherhood...

'Professor Bandukwala opened my eyes to see that to bring change in our society we should use the language of the people, which mostly is religion,' says Mushtaq. 'He said that the conflicts between Muslims, Jews and Christians can only be resolved by going back to our history. In doing so, we will realize that we all have the same ancestry. We should, in fact, be closer to each other. This changed my attitude towards Christians. I was otherwise negative towards them since I saw that most conflicts were between the Christians and Muslims.'

Miftahul Huda, another AfL participant, comes from Indonesia, which has the world's largest Muslim population. Indonesia continues to experience divisions on ethnic, religious, political and social grounds.

'To think and care for others is the biggest stretch in my life and, so far, the most satisfying'

But Huda strongly expresses hope: 'Through IofC Indonesia, we are reaching out to this diverse community by making friendships and building trust. We have struck up friendships with the Chinese community and students at a Christian University. This way we can solve conflicts like friends.'

'Like Indonesia, India is diverse in religion. While on fieldwork, I met Buddhist, Muslim and Hindu leaders who are working for humanity. This opened my mind. What counts is how all these religions can contribute to the country's welfare. An Islamic teaching speaks of the best people being those who

give meaning to others' lives. The diversity of religion, ethnicity and culture is the source of a country's strength.'

In June 2008, Huda was part of the organizing team for an International Youth Forum in which young people from different countries converged to discuss the role of youth in achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

While preparing for the coming visit by an AfL team to Cambodia, one of the AfL support staff painted a grotesque picture of the communist rule under the Khmer Rouge which caused the deaths of one fifth of the country's total population through execution, torture, starvation and forced labour. We learned how in 1979 Vietnam invaded Cambodia and removed the Khmer Rouge regime from power.

The 10-year Vietnamese occupation, however, created animosities between the two peoples. In response to this bitter history, young IofC teams in each country created a Cambodia-Vietnam Dialogue, which seeks to heal the past and bring these two countries together.

Thanh Tam Phan from Vietnam now speaks of taking this dialogue to another level. 'I want to understand where the hate is coming from,' she says, 'so that the two countries can care for each other. On AfL, I have had ideas from various IofC programmes, such as Family Workshops, Peace Circles and Vietnam I Care, which could strengthen the dialogue.'

Ann Njeri's conviction for peace-building found expression through organizing similar programmes in her native Kenya. Her passion was tested during the recent post-election violence that saw approximately 1,500 killed and 600,000 displaced, as the largest constituent tribes – the Kikuyu and Luo – were pitted against each other. Years ago, Njeri's family was a victim of tribal clashes when they were kicked out of their home.

Njeri speaks passionately of her conviction: 'Forgiveness, embracing our diversity, understanding the other and respecting our differences is my message and part of my life. A campaign is under way and I have made a commitment to remain in the front line to fight the monster of tribalism. If the right steps are not taken, there could be more deaths, suffering and pain. AfL is giving me different perspectives which are strengthening my vision.'

Action for Life has been planned and coordinated by a 'core team' consisting mainly of graduates from previous AfL programmes. Tatiana Minbaeva, for instance, came back from Russia to help run AfL because, 'I was touched by how the core team had cared for and supported us. To think and care for others is the biggest stretch in my life and, so far, the most satisfying.'

Four AfL teams have now left India for other parts of Asia, continuing our journey of discovery into change and trust-building before taking its lessons back into our own situations after our graduation in May 2009.