

Initiatives of Change international conference, Melbourne, 12-16 January 2007

'Australia as a neighbour ... Bridging the divides with compassion, integrity and global responsibility'

It was a summer of more than usual ferocity, with bushfires starting early and spreading to burn out large areas of eastern Australia, most of all in Victoria. But in mid-January as people from around Australia gathered in Melbourne for the 'Australia as a neighbour' conference, coming from the close Pacific/Asian neighbourhood, and from as far as Japan and Europe, the weather relented and 'marvellous Melbourne' was at its most captivating, turning on four mild and sparkling days.

The weather was on people's minds in more ways than one. In 2006 the reality of climate change began to force itself on the world's consciousness, not least in drought-ravaged Australia. No subject illustrates more decisively that all human beings are part of a global neighbourhood where there are no borders. The conference began with a keynote address by Bishop George Browning, convenor of the Anglican Communion Environmental Network. [see p2]

At the opening dinner Melbourne's Lord Mayor, John So, welcomed the visitors. Australia, he said was now 'at the heart of fast-developing Asia', and Melbourne was one of the world's great multicultural capitals. He was supported by George Lekakis, Chairman of the



Victorian Multicultural Commission, which had given funds towards the conference.

The conference was the vision of two Melbourne couples, one Aboriginal and the other Asian Australians. The vision was caught by others. Many elements were based on the work of the diverse community that operates from and around Armagh, the Initiatives of Change national headquarters in Melbourne, which in 2006 celebrated its 50th anniversary.

Human and financial resources were stretched. But on 12 January the vision became reality with 285 people converging on International House, the university residential college also founded 50 years ago as the result of a peacemaking vision. The Head of the college, Assoc Prof Jane Munro, in welcoming the conference commented how 'love for the stranger' (Greek *filoxenia*) was a shared ideal of Initiatives of Change and International House.

'Australia is a microcosm of the world,' stated the conference invitation. 'No one said it was going to be easy living together. But if we can get it right we have something precious to offer a divided planet.' In pursuit of that vision the conference tackled three broad subjects:

- Living with the neighbour who is different: discovering the other [p.3]
- Healing journeys: facing our past and looking to the future [p.6]



Lord Mayor of Melbourne, John So, welcoming delegates at the opening dinner.

- Beyond the bottom line: ethics at work, confronting corruption, development as if people matter [p.7]

Altogether 80 people spoke in the plenary sessions. Two cultural evenings introduced people to each other via artistry, music and dance as well as words. Workshops on environmental initiatives, Pacific developments,



families, Peace Circles, measuring corruption (led by Transparency International director David Mattiske), Aboriginal rush weaving and silk painting, leaves of healing, Discover the Other and Initiatives of

Change, drama, yoga — all gave the conference an interactive character. Even some plenaries were conducted interactively.

Half of dialogue is listening. 'Listening to the spirit within' was the theme at early morning reflection sessions introduced by Rev Glennis Johnston. Small group discussions gave everyone a chance to say what was on their hearts and to get to know a few people well over the four days.



People travelled from 15 countries to attend, from Cambodia, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Papua

Continued on back page ➤

Righteousness and relationships

By Rt Reverend George Browning, Anglican Bishop of Canberra and Goulburn

'The effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever' — Isaiah 32:17

'Righteousness' is to do with right relationships: the relationship between the community and the individual; the relationship between people of different nations; and the relationship that people have with God.

Today relationships are global, and the failure of relationships in the 21st Century will bring disaster for the whole of humankind. This particular virtue of righteousness is not optional. We cannot and must not fail in our relationships with one another. And the responsibility for right relationships always rests more with the stronger than the weaker; more with the wealthy than the poor; more with the powerful than the powerless. In Australia as a neighbour we are powerful and wealthy. We cannot and must not neglect our responsibility in this area.

Individualism

I have been quite a strong critic of various government policies and actions. But my greatest argument is with the ideology of individualism that lies behind them. Individualism is the enemy of righteousness, because individualism does not take into account the relationships which undergird the wellbeing of all humankind.

Individualism is seen in economic policy. It is also seen, tragically, in policy with the Aboriginal people. It is because of the view that an individual can apologise only for what the individual has done that we have neglected one of our great responsibilities to the Indigenous people of Australia. In actual fact, we are all the inheritors of both the good and the bad of the past. The effect of a corporate sense of responsibility for what has gone before, and the release that comes through apology for it, has escaped many of the powerful leadership of our time — to the great detriment of our country.

There is a huge responsibility for us to deal with the pain of the past in order that

Speeches are mostly quoted briefly in this report. All have been shortened. You are invited to read complete versions under 'Melbourne conference' on our website <http://www.au.iofc.org>

it can be sufficiently remembered so that it can be safely forgotten. Whether it's in the Middle East, or the Balkans, or Northern Ireland, or with the Indigenous people of Australia: if pain is not dealt with appropriately, it is forever remembered. And the remembering of it continues the violence and the perpetration of that violence from generation to generation to generation.

Climate change

I have become greatly involved in the environmental movement. I believe that it is the great social issue of our time — and that time is running out. We are actually at a point where we have to decide whether we want our children and our grandchildren to have a future or not. Every day I have a mantra that I ask myself: 'What will I do today that my grandchildren will thank me for, or curse me for, in 50 years' time?' This matter is important to me because:

- It is one of the issues that unites all people of faith. It is our core business. We believe that all human life and every living thing is sacred to God the creator. We have no right whatsoever to a standard of living that diminishes what we have received.
- Like most other problems, environmental degradation affects the poor the most. We will not 'make poverty history' unless we deal with the environment issue as well.
- This issue affects future generations, and as a person of faith I believe in intergenerational morality.

As individuals and communities we should take seriously our responsibilities in relationship to others, to the poor and to future generations, and we should put pressure on our governments to act responsibly. Last December I wrote an open letter to the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition saying I did not believe it would be morally right for anyone to vote for a party that did not have a credible climate change policy. I believe our government must, with the rest of the world, price carbon.

I haven't mentioned anything to do with personal morality — euthanasia, homosexuality — and in Australia at the present time you would have every



Bishop George Browning is Convenor of the (global) Anglican Communion Environmental Network; Board Member and co-founder of the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture; Member, Advisory Council, Climate Institute; and Chair of the Board, Centre for an Ethical Society.

reason to think that these were the main issues that relate to righteousness. It is strange that I have to make the point that matters of public morality, justice or ethics are core to righteousness. A good student of the Bible would understand that these public issues are as much to do with righteousness as personal morality.

I want to conclude by coming back to righteousness. One of the great failures of righteousness is the case of David Hicks. The fact that we can abandon ordinary human rights for a cause puts into question the rightness of the cause itself. We in Australia are in a debate about values. We've named 'a fair go' one of the main Australian values - but when you think of David Hicks you wonder whether it actually is an Australian value. And yet it is a value which is held by all peoples universally.

Righteousness is a virtue. A virtue is far deeper than a value — it is an expression of truth. Righteousness is one fundamental expression of truth that requires courage to live by. My hope and prayer for this conference is that you'll hear truth spoken: that having heard it, you'll live it and have the courage to make a difference in this world of which we are a part. That we may truly be, as Jesus asked us to be, good neighbours of one another.

This is an edited extract of the keynote address at the opening of the conference.

The theme of the first full day was ...

Living with the neighbour who is different: Discovering the other

New, old and original Australians and some of their neighbours looked across the barriers and saw that difference has a lot to teach us.

John (Yanni) Patriki, co-chairing the session, shared his experience growing up as a Greek-Australian. He spoke about being caught between two worlds — that of his ethnic origin and the wider Anglo culture. 'We need to belong, to be accepted and to have our difference valued,' he said.

Phong Nguyen, Chairperson of the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria, told how he had dealt with a difficult neighbour in his apartment block — a white Anglo-Saxon woman who was racially prejudiced and angry to be living in a mainly non-white neighbourhood. Overcoming his fear, Phong took her some spring rolls to celebrate Vietnamese New Year. This simple act of kindness started a warm relationship which completely changed her attitudes.

Life changed

Jim Beggs, Melbourne Branch President of the Waterside Workers 1971-1992 and for many years National President, said his life had been changed by a next-door neighbour of a different political background who cared for him in practical ways and taught him the secret 'Change starts with myself.'

Teresa Lawler told of the love she found for another country when she went to teach English in China and made friends there. 'When I came back to Australia I started studying Chinese at university. People have assumed I'm interested in some high-flying career. I'm not studying Chinese for a career, although I do enjoy the challenge of such a difficult language. I'm studying Chinese because I want to sit on a train in

China and understand what people are telling me about their lives. It's not the similarities but the differences that attracted me to China.'

Bowen Plug, a resident at International House and science student, comes from WA. 'Before I came to International House I never liked the idea of being with overseas tourists or immigrants. SARS, terrorists, illegal immigrants and invasion were usually the first terms to spring to mind. So when I received my offer for this college I am ashamed to say I had to spend two weeks deciding whether I could handle living in such a racially diverse environment. Finally I decided that I would fulfil my responsibility as a citizen and ambassador of Australia. I would aspire to show to every person I met from overseas that Aussies can be friendly, accepting and embracing of other cultures...'

Adi Lamawa and Adi Paulini Vesikula from Fiji said they had a normal sister-to-sister relationship. Lamawa said she was a 'drama queen' while younger sister Paulini admitted being the 'irritating brat'. 'We've been brought closer together through just listening.'



Troy Blow

'God is also a neighbour,' said **Troy Blow**, a youth worker at the Maya Centre for Healing, telling about overcoming alcoholism through 'a spiritual way of living'.

Phuoc Minh Ho from Vietnam and **Vathnak Chhoeurm** from Cambodia spoke about an ongoing grass-roots dialogue between their countries. While many Cambodians feel deeply that Vietnam has caused their country much pain and suffering over the centuries, most young Vietnamese are unaware that Cambodians feel this. The dialogue started in 2004 at an Asia-Pacific Youth Conference in Cambodia organised by Initiatives of Change when two Cambodians spoke of their decisions to forgive Vietnam. The young Vietnamese present were shocked to hear these perspectives and as a result three dialogue sessions took place at the conference.



Phuoc Minh Ho from Vietnam and Vathnak Chhoeurm from Cambodia speaking about the grassroots dialogue between their countries.

Out of this grew a team of young people in both countries determined to keep the conversations going. Over the past two years they have organised several visits to each other's countries for relationship-building exchanges.

Abdul Mukti from Indonesia is a senior lecturer in Islamic education and Secretary of the Council of Education on the Central Board of Muhammadiyah, one of Indonesia's two great Islamic organisations. Until 2006 he was Chairperson of the Central Board of Muhammadiyah Youth.

Indonesian stereotypes

He spoke of his own personal growth of perspective, coming from a village background where anything non-Muslim was unfamiliar and suspect. Meeting Hindus and other non-Muslim Indonesians in Bali, then living as a student in Australia exposed him to other viewpoints.

He described negative Indonesian stereotypes of Australia and actions such as Australian aid for tsunami victims which counter those views. He concluded: 'Based on my personal experience, we could attain peaceful and harmonious relations with the neighbour who is different if we: (1) are aware of our differences; (2) understand the source of our differences; (3) respect the differences with sincerity; (4) have openness to discuss problems; (5) develop cooperation on the basis of shared similarities.'



(L to R) Adi Paulini Vesikula and Adi Lamawa — two sisters from Fiji 'brought together through listening'.

Australia as a neighbour

How can Australians improve our relationships with our neighbours – both within the country and in the region?

The fear button

David Mills is a singer/songwriter. On behalf of Initiatives of Change, he has helped organise a series of Muslim-Christian community dialogues around Sydney involving hundreds of participants.

Sometimes the business of being the right kind of neighbour gets pretty close to home. My wife, Jane, and I a few years back decided we should take a peace offering to our next door neighbours after our two families nearly got into a rather nasty conflict. We are now quite good friends but I realise how different it could have been.



David Mills

The history of the way Australians have treated our neighbours and the New Australians who have come to make their home here is a very mixed bag. We have struggled to be inclusive but when the fear button is pressed we can quickly revert to the 'them and us' attitudes. There was an element of this in the Cronulla riots in Sydney a year ago. I have been involved in programs attempting to address that issue with the communities most affected.

'If we had cared consistently would things have been different?'

The 'humble Australian' sought

Jim Coulter was a World War II pilot and a journalist. After the war he pioneered many MRA/lofC initiatives in Australia.



Jim Coulter

Last year my wife, Rita, and I spent two periods in Fiji. When I told of the conference here in Melbourne with the aim of making Australia the right sort of neighbour, I was challenged by the enthusiasm of the

response. The implication was that the 'humble Australian' was a fairly rare species.

People knew we had not been good at neighbouring when we moved into a continent that had been inhabited for 60,000 years. Many Solomon Islanders remember our practice of 'blackbirding' — forcibly taking thousands from their islands to labour in our canefields. And there is the deeply remembered stain of the White Australia Policy.

Our government has deplored the coup in Fiji, but if we had cared consistently would things have been different? New Zealand has had a heart-to-heart relationship with the nations of the Pacific. If we had humbly sought their

help perhaps together we could have spelt out plainly the moral changes necessary

for our full support. If we had been honest about our own flaws it might have got traction on key issues such as exposing those who were behind previous coups and tackling corruption at the highest level.

We have proclaimed that we will decide who sets foot on our country. Perhaps we have to move on to the realisation that it is God's country — and we neither discovered it nor do we own it. Perhaps we need the wisdom of the original inhabitants and our neighbours to know how best to use our bounty for the good of all.

Learning to listen

Mary Louise O'Callaghan, originally from Melbourne, has lived for the last 20 years in Solomon Islands. She is married to Joses Tuhanuku, a former Member of Parliament and Government Minister. She is an award-winning journalist and commentator on regional Pacific affairs.

We white Australians tend to talk in headlines. We create a pyramid. We start off with the most important point we



(L to R) Sir Ebia Olewale, former Deputy Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea, talking with Deane Belfield and Jim Carlton.

want to make and then we might fill in some details as we go. It's a highly competitive process — we all compete to get our points in.

It is completely the opposite of the Pacific islanders' way of communicating. Their communication style is an inverted pyramid. They want to give you the context first. They want to explain why something is important. It means you might not get to the heart of the matter



Mary Louise O'Callaghan

for three sentences, or three hours, or three days, depending on the issue and the circumstances. They will actually wait for the space, for the

silence — and if you don't give it to them they won't necessarily try and punch in that headline. Silence is something that we are pretty scared of. The ability to enjoy and participate in non-verbal communication, in silence, is not something familiar to many white Australians or Europeans.

I remember one of the first interviews I did in Vanuatu. I felt there was a real meeting of minds with this person and was happy because he'd said things which confirmed the points that I'd wanted to make in my feature article. I raced back to the hotel to transcribe the interview so that I could use his quotes. The problem was that all of his sentences were finished off by me! I hadn't actually let him finish what he was saying — so I didn't have quotes I could use.

I've had to discipline myself as an Australian journalist to actually stop and listen and wait. That is what we need to do more than anything in our relationship with the region.

The disease of egocentricity

Waleed Aly is a leading Muslim



Waleed Aly

Australian commentator, a commercial lawyer and an Executive Committee member of the Islamic Council of Victoria.

Relationships between people who are noticeably different can only proceed once both parties to that relationship conquer the intellectual disease of egocentricity. What I mean is that the vast majority of us, if we are really being honest with ourselves, tend to approach people with a deep assumption that 'the

world would be a much better place if only everybody was just like me'.

Back in the very early period of the war in Iraq, the 'Coalition of the Willing' was trying hard to create a post-Saddam Hussein Iraq that was modelled on American-style secular democracy. There's a lot of great things about the American system of government and the way American society and politics are structured. But Iraq is not America.

This was most manifest when it came to the idea of the secular state.

Throughout the Middle East, since the colonial period the absence of religion in the public sphere has been accompanied by a stream of very dictatorial regimes. So the idea of religion coming back into

the political sphere is seen, by many, in much the same way that people in the West see a bill of rights — as a means by which rulers can be held accountable to some kind of external standard.

The same lessons apply closer to home. How do we overcome the climate of fear? It's not about overlooking the difficult issues. It's about having some kind of intellectual matrix for understanding our differences. Then we begin to understand that human behaviour is a product of a whole complex of inputs. When we do that, not only do we get a much more sophisticated analysis, we get one that can provide a bedrock for a more positive kind of interaction.

Sudanese Youth for Reconciliation and Hope

Sudanese Youth for Reconciliation and Hope is a Melbourne-based group working to end civil war in their country of origin. The group comes from different parts of Sudan and from different sides in the conflict. In the Public Forum a Southerner and a Northerner spoke together.

Deng Riak came to Australia in 2004 and works as a security officer:

I was born in South Sudan during the war. I fled to Ethiopia in the care of my older sister. In 1991 we were forced to run for our lives to Kenya. As a young refugee I endured starvation, floods, mosquito bites, seeing dead people, wild animals. Most of the time I would go to bed with an empty stomach. I slept shivering on a wet floor. These memories are still fresh in my mind.

When I joined Sudanese Youth for Reconciliation and Hope, I told myself, 'Here is a chance at last for Sudanese to make a difference.' I didn't want Sudanese children to go through what I had been through.

Ahmed Gillanie from North Sudan is studying legal services and has lived in Australia for 3 years:

My life was happy, but I used to treat my brothers from the South with arrogance and racism. Because I am a Muslim from an Arabic background I thought I am better than everyone.

I was shocked when I left Sudan and went to a country where we were a



Deng Riak

minority. One day I met a group of locals and without any reason they jumped on top of me and started kicking me. They called me the same names I used to call my brothers from the South. I went home and looked at myself in the mirror and said, 'Well, I deserve it.'



Ahmed Gillanie

A friend told me about the group 'Sudanese Youth for Reconciliation and Hope' and the work to support the peace agreement which has been signed in Sudan between the North and the South. We started to say sorry to our brothers from the South. In November I and another member of the group went together to Sudan. We discovered the people still not believing this peace agreement will work. The Northerners don't trust the Southerners and vice versa.

We decided to have a conference in Juba, where the war started, and to mobilise a lot of Sudanese youth from the North, the South, the West, and get them together and open our hearts.

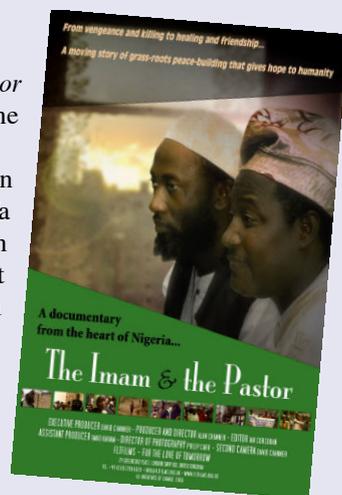
The Imam & the Pastor

A new documentary film *The Imam and the Pastor* had its Australian premiere during the Melbourne conference.

It tells the amazing story of two Nigerian religious leaders, Imam Muhammad Nurayn Ashafa and Pastor James Movel Wuye from the northern Nigerian city of Kaduna where in the past thousands have been killed in Christian-Muslim fighting.

Both men were members of militias on opposite sides but were disillusioned by the violence. They now work closely together as joint directors of Kaduna's Interfaith Mediation Centre.

The film, produced by FLT Films, London, is available to *Newsbriefs* readers on DVD from Grosvenor Books, Melbourne, price \$32.50. It was launched at the UN in New York in November and in London in December 2006.



The theme of the second full day was ...

Healing journeys:

Facing our past and looking to the future

Healing is needed at the social, family and individual level, the conference heard.



Aboriginal didgeridoo players

Reg Blow is CEO of the Maya Living Free Healing Association:

For Aboriginal communities in Australia it's like a battle zone after the fighting has ended. After 200 years of dispossession, loss of language and cultural identity and worst of all deaths in custody and child abuse, you become a victim of everything in life, and the victim is not responsible and can wallow in self pity and 'woe is me'.



Reg Blow

We need to play a role in this game of life. We Aboriginal people thought we had nothing to offer but there are thousands of years of our heritage. In our traditional society sharing and caring was the basis of our life. If we didn't do that we didn't survive. In our situation today we need to start sharing some of the knowledge that we have. By giving we become empowered.

Dr Penny Ramsay, General Medical Practitioner, NT:

In 2005 my family and I spent a year living at a remote Aboriginal community in Arnhemland.



Aboriginal singer Johnny Huckle. 'When the power of love defeats the love of power ...'

As I started to see the complexity of the causes of poor health I became less inclined to naively put forward bright ideas about how to 'fix things'.

Lasting improvements in health generally occur when the initiative comes from the community and is instituted in a culturally appropriate way.

One simple practice I came to rely on during the year was my jog down the airstrip at the start of each day when I laid the challenges and frustrations of the previous day before God. I would almost always get a fresh perspective and move from feeling dejected and annoyed to hopeful and at peace.

Ron Lawler, funding services director in NSW State Government:

A highlight of my last 14 years in South Western NSW has been the establishment of a cultural and development centre for 12–15 year old Aboriginal boys. Set on bushland away from town, it runs programs based on developing their resilience to prevent them from getting into the juvenile justice system.

My own contribution over many years came from seeking inspiration from the inner voice for the way ahead. This was indispensable to my bureaucratic role as a planner.

Alexander Birnberg, former Commonwealth public servant:

Little things get in between people, small annoyances or habits. With my sister-in-law, we got so angry with each other over 30 cents' worth of vegetables, we didn't speak for a year. Then it came to me: peace can only happen if it is the only goal. I met my brother and sister-in-law. We did not get into the past of who was right or wrong — just started anew.

Jane Mills, Sydney, Chair of Australian IofC Council of Management:

Arabic is Sydney's second language. In Sydney for the last three years I and a number of women have been involved in Peace Circles. So far 14 have taken place and almost all have included Muslim women. Their participation has meant much to the non-Muslim women.

Sherene Hassan, Secretary, Islamic Council of Victoria Executive Committee, spoke by DVD:

After the horror of 11 September 2001 she wrote to the newspapers expressing her 'immense grief and sadness' at this 'heinous crime', and also her devastation that she was 'no longer treated as a fellow Australian' despite being born here. In return she received a beautiful, supportive letter from an Australian non-Muslim couple. 'I have decided to dedicate my life to bridging the gap between Muslim and non-Muslim.'

Andre Gorgievski, a student at the SAE film Institute, Melbourne, and manager of Major Street Basketball Foundation, showed a short film he had made



Andre Gorgievski

depicting his journey from drugs and hopelessness to helping youth join him in his positive passion for basketball.

Mick Vertigan, teacher in Albany, WA:

I've spent nearly 35 years teaching in secondary schools.

The effect it had on me at the end of a long day was that discipline at home was tight and often harsh. My style generated fear and resentment in my six children (Laura, below, is one of them) which they have had to deal with, each in their own way. Since that time I've taken time with each one of them individually to apologise for that time and try and explain where it came from.

Laura Vertigan student of theology:

I think of my Dad now as a good mate. He's been there for me even when I needed to tell him that I hated his guts.

What has been really powerful for me has been acknowledging the past, acknowledging my own pain and acknowledging my parents' pain, recognising that we were more alike than I ever imagined. Forgiving them and forgiving myself.

The theme of the last full day was ...

Beyond the Bottom Line: Building trust and integrity

This session began with a photograph from space showing the earth as a tiny speck in the universe. 'Our global identity' was the context for the discussion that followed on business and economic ethics.



Arnold Zable, Melbourne writer and novelist, author of *The Fig Tree*:

The bottom line in business, in the workplace, is about building relationships.

If we look people in the eye and have conversations then we have got a chance.

Grahame Leonard is President of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry and a director of Transparency International Australia:

Corruption is the single major cause of endemic poverty in the world.

The AWB scandal is an example of what happens when good governance is not in place.



Grahame Leonard

Corruption in Australia is fairly sophisticated. The real need is to bring it into the public arena. That's why TI has worked for effective whistleblower protection.

Denis Tracey is Deputy Director of the Asia-Pacific Centre for Philanthropy and Social Investment at Swinburne University Business School, Melbourne:

Sensible companies realise that some sort of relationship with the society in which they operate is good for business.



Ted Holmes from Melbourne talks with Metuisela Tuivavalagi from Fiji

Probably the best example is the relationship between Bakers Delight and the Breast Cancer Society. They have set up an office with computers and have given access to some 800 outlets. What Bakers Delight gets out of it is their soul.



Sandi Noble worked at the high end of the fashion industry:

The last job I had took me to India, where some of the dresses we sold were produced, for the Academy Awards and other functions.

In Mumbai we were driving in a limousine and I saw these cardboard 'lean-tos'. The driver said, 'Those are the textile workers' homes.' The woman I worked for wanted to reduce the wages of the workers.

Around that time I had an encounter with God. I was shown His incredible love for us and the lack of love with which we treat each other.

I made a commitment to work for my values and not for money. I left the wonderful world of fashion and worked for 13 years as a volunteer mainly with Mother Teresa's organisation.

At the Prahran Mission where I work now people have no personal power. Working ethically means seeing the divine spark in them.

Ron Lawler is a funding services director with the NSW State Government:

When I first applied ethics and values to myself I realised I needed to return some items I had stolen from the warehouse where I worked. When I get free from the small compromises I am empowered to deal with the larger challenges.

Phil Jefferys works with the international program *Farmers' Dialogue*. Last year he and his wife visited five African countries:

Over 60% of the world's poorest people are farmers. Farming is at the basis of life and farming is the world's biggest business. Right now 50,000 people die



The Earth seen from space: 'the only home we have got'. (photo: NASA)

every day from the effects of poverty. We face an ethical choice: plan for a world for everyone, or plan for a world for a few people who will make it and the rest will be left out.

Graeme Cordiner is co-founder of Australian Independents Coalition for Political Integrity:

We are about process rather than outcomes at any cost. What is success? Success is having a go.

Joses Tuhanuku is a former Trade Union leader, MP and Government Minister, and currently Director of Transparency Solomon Islands:



Joses Tuhanuku

Corruption hits the most basic needs of the people, not enough classrooms, not enough beds in the hospital. In Solomon Islands it is endemic.

I used to think you could stamp out corruption. After 20 years involved in these things I realise that is impossible. What we have to do is organise ourselves to deal with corruption. That is how I see my involvement with Winds of Change and Transparency Solomon Islands. We must not give up, not give in, not expect that it is going to happen overnight.

Deane Belfield of Eco2Sys Consulting, **Nithi Nesadurai** of Environment Protection Society Malaysia and **Tom Duncan** of EcoPlan Consulting led a well-attended workshop on 'environmental initiatives of change'.

Issues of climate change, drought, environmental disasters, renewable energy, food vs. fuel debate, nuclear power, nuclear waste, and carbon taxes all came back to the question: 'How can I as an individual make an environmental change in my life that will be part of the solution?'

... Continued from page 1 ➤

Australia as a neighbour

New Guinea, Romania, Solomon Islands, Taiwan, the UK, Vietnam.

It was a chance to share burdens and hopes. A former Deputy Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea, Sir Ebia Olewale, Ratu Meli Vesikula of Fiji and Joses Tuhanuku of Solomon Islands spoke of difficulties in governance being experienced in each of their Pacific nations. Connections were made between people enabling sometimes practical and sometimes moral support.

At the final session people from across the region spoke from their hearts. A Japanese whose paid position had been discontinued with the sale of a conference centre said that his commitment remained 'obedience to God's calling'. Japan would host its 30th international IofC conference 15-17 June in Tokyo, and collaborate with India in hosting a conference in Panchgani (near Pune) in November on making 'the process of globalisation more equitable'.

A Malaysian was inspired by the diversity of people he had met, and another Malaysian apologised for a mistake he felt he had made. A Taiwanese called for prayers for his country, hit by a high-level corruption scandal, and announced the next Asia Pacific Youth Conference, to be held next July 2007 in the Philippines.

Fiji sent the largest delegation consisting mostly of young people keen to continue the work begun at the major



The ideas behind Initiatives of Change

The conference was a gathering of people who want to respond to the needs of Australia and its Asian/Pacific neighbours. But how?

- i) Initiatives of Change works towards the building of effective nations through the powerful idea that each of us can respond by taking a step of action based on four universal principles: absolute honesty, absolute purity, absolute unselfishness and absolute love.
- ii) This is linked with the idea

IofC conference held in Suva the previous November 'New Hope from Fiji: making this a vision

possible'.

Ana Vesikula, working in Fiji's Ministry of Reconciliation,

reported after the delegation

returned: 'The Conference was wonderful. It lifted the self esteem of our young people — a great confidence-building exercise. Our group participated in discussions as well as telling personal stories from the front. There was a good representation from the smaller Pacific islands and a very visible

representation of the Aboriginal people of Australia.' The Fijians are now taking opportunities to present IofC ideas and approaches as a 'base for nation-building programs in the current situation [since the 5 December coup] and for restoring hurt and fractured relationships.'

Peter Thwaites



of making time for silence to search for divine guidance. It is the practice of inner listening, of quietly waiting for the intuitive leading of the still small voice that speaks in the heart. 'Making space for grace.'

Small steps of change are links in the network working towards healing, faith and integrity.

Nigel Heywood co-led the short daily session 'Heart of Transformation' introducing the principles of Initiatives of Change.

From the morning reflections:

Day 1: Values of the heart

I made a start with putting right certain obvious things — a return of money, some apologies — but to turn away from deeply ingrained greed, pride or self-seeking was another matter. This is where I found the standards of absolute honesty, purity, unselfishness and love - a rough and challenging summary of the Sermon on the Mount - so helpful. — Garth Lean

Day 2: Journey into wholeness

Beware the fog of fear... When you're not in touch with your soul, you'll think your cravings — to have, to hold, to ensure, to win, to be seen as a victim — are your desires. They aren't. Fear shrinks the capacity of your soul to breathe, to live a spirit of gratitude. — Patrick Oliver

Day 3: Listening and discovery

The true relation in prayer is not when God hears what is prayed for, but when the person praying continues to pray until he is the one who hears, who hears what God wills. The 'immediate' person... makes demands in his prayers; the true man of prayer only attends. — Soren Kierkegaard

Day 4: Living on the edge — risk-taking

The golden rule for understanding in spiritual matters is not intellect, but obedience. — Oswald Chambers

All quotations compiled by Rev Glennis Johnston

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