

2004: Opportunity abounds...

*We are looking forward to an adventurous 2004, writes John Bond.
Here are some events in which MRA-IC Australia will be involved in 2004:*

6–15 February: *Life Matters*, "a course for young adults to shape a path and purpose for living", will bring an international group to Armagh, the MRA-IC Centre in Melbourne.

31 March–5 April: An *international IC consultation* in Lebanon will consider "the basic intuition" of MRA-IC, and how to build creative partnerships. Participants will "search together for the depth of change in all of us that is commensurate with the crisis in the Middle East, and between the West and the Muslim world". Australia will be represented by Kathy Al-Kaisi from Perth.

26 May: *Sorry Day* followed by ***Reconciliation Week***. Many people involved in MRA-IC are active in the reconciliation process. No country finds it easy to face the ugly side of its past, so the unveiling on Sorry Day of a memorial in Canberra to the stolen generations is significant, and a big step along the Journey of Healing. The text and design was developed through consultations arranged by the National Sorry Day Committee with those involved, Aboriginal and white. Both Houses of the Federal Parliament approved the memorial in December.

1 June: *National Open Homes, Open Hearts Day*. Launched at the MRA-IC conference at Collaroy, Sydney, last year, this day provides an opportunity for Australians of all backgrounds to reach out to people from another culture, faith or ethnic background by inviting them into their homes to share a cup of tea or a meal.

21–24 June: A *conference in the Solomon Islands*. From the Solomons to the MRA-IC conference at Collaroy came Matthew Wale, founder of the Civil Society Network, Joses Tuhanku MP, Leader of the Labour Party and Deputy Leader of the Opposition, and Henry Tobani, a member of the Peace Monitoring Council. Their

concern is how to build a moral infrastructure in the country's institutions adequate to prevent the tragedies of recent years from recurring. They invited four people whom they met at the conference to visit the Solomons – Dr Stuart Phillpot, who is experienced in national development processes, and MRA-IC workers David and Jane Mills and Alan Weeks – and, following their visits, have now initiated this conference. Among those they are inviting to the conference are Kenyan lawyer Joseph Karanja, initiator of a national Clean Election Campaign, Ratu Meli

... Even at ninety-two

On 16 November the ABC Radio National program, *The Spirit of Things*, featured 92-year-old Tom Gillespie. The presenter, Rachael Kohn, described Tom as "a man with a twinkle in his eye and love in his heart, as well as a firm belief in God". She told the listeners that she'd got to know him through his letters, and was impressed by his range of interests. "You write about all sorts of topics, always with a view to how they can improve the world. Many people when they get older tend to get cynical. How do you keep open?"

Tom responded by saying that as a young man his mind had been closed – "because I didn't like to be wrong. That made me arrogant. And I had a bad temper. My mother told me that my temper would get me into trouble, and I flew off the handle at her!"

Then he had encountered the Oxford Group (as MRA-IC was known then) through his dentist, who told him that he had learned to listen for God's direction rather than just pray. "He listened, and was clear that he had to tell his wife about things he was doing which she didn't know. He apologised to her, and they were reconciled."

Tom tried it. At the time he was working for his uncle in a beer and whisky company. He felt that he shouldn't be part of an industry which caused such social disaster in Scottish society. So,

Vesikula, a respected Fijian leader, and Jone Dakavula, Chair of Fiji's Citizens' Constitutional Forum.

8 July–19 August: International IC conferences at *Caux*, Switzerland, on the theme, *Narrowing the gap between ideals and interests*, to which Australians will make a significant contribution.

Late July: *Asia Pacific Youth Conference* in Siem Riep, Cambodia, hosted by the Khmer Youth Association and *Action for Life*.

20–24 October: An *MRA-IC conference in Apia, capital of Samoa*, hosted by Teuila Hall and Fetu Paulo and their team. Fetu, who has spent much of the past 10 years with MRA in Melbourne, says that Samoa faces many problems, particularly corruption. She believes that the conference can help people find the values which will answer these problems, and so avert the unrest which has caused such harm in Fiji and the Solomons.

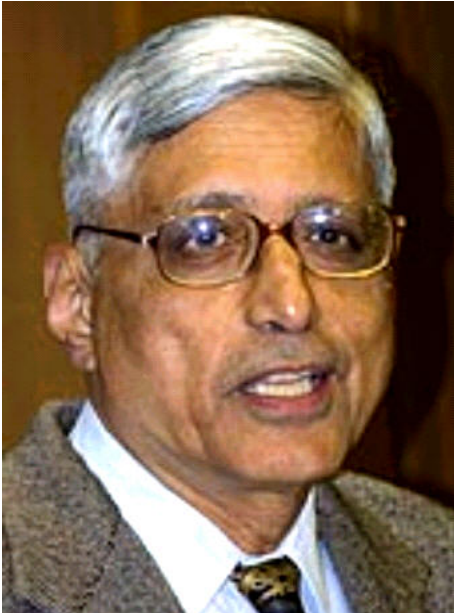
despite the disappointment of most of his family, he left. He was unemployed for a year, during which time he learnt shorthand and typing. Then he got a job at a shipyard on the Clyde and before long his new approach to life was helping to resolve disputes.

Kohn said to him, "You still seem to be very active, which is remarkable for a man of 92." Tom responded, "I feel I have been created for a purpose. So I don't feel downhearted about anything at all."

Tom is remarkable. Though largely confined to his retirement village in Sydney he corresponds with people all over the world, including many he hears on the radio or reads about in the press. Last November, a well-known Australian journalist wrote him, "I very much appreciate the interest you show in my work. You always offer thoughtful comments. People like you make this job worthwhile." And when Aboriginal leader Geoff Clark spoke to Australia's national leaders at Corroboree 2000 in the Sydney Opera House, he started his speech with a letter he'd received from Tom.

Tom has had many letters since the program, including one from a couple in Canada who heard it through the Internet. So it looks as if his correspondence is set to grow further.

A CD of the interview is available from Jonathan Lancaster, 226 Kooyong Rd, Toorak, VIC 3142 or (03) 9822 1218.



Gandhi speaks in Beirut

Extracts from an article in Beirut's English language Daily Star newspaper, 17 Jan 2004

Mahatma Gandhi's grandson preaches the message of non-violence to rapt AUB audience *by Monica Smith*

Highlighting lessons from the assassinated leader's life, the younger Gandhi highlighted parallels between M K Gandhi's lifetime of struggle for Indian independence, human rights and religious equality with the Arab world's problems today, especially the plight of the Palestinians.

Nowadays, politics is "ruled from a barrel of a gun and an ATM machine", Gandhi said. "But there are many Americans willing to understand the Arab world; try to see how to win the goodwill of those sympathetic with you. Seek to influence US-Israeli policies."

"We must make our own campaign clean and clear so that others can not say anything against us," he said, adding that his grandfather fiercely believed truth comes from listening to the heart, wherein lie the roots of justice.

The younger Gandhi's words extended to beyond the Palestinian cause, to encompass Arabs and the global community.

"M K Gandhi," he said, "would have asked Arabs the same questions he posed to Hindus. 'How are your relations with each other?' Turn the searchlight inward. Look at how to

create a partnership with other Arabs."

He cited the vast hatred within the Arab world and pointed to the great divisions that exist even without the problems posed by Israel. "Arabs love to hate the US. But where does that get you?" he asked. "We need to find alternative solutions. Like the Indians, Arabs have faults too."

Gandhi insisted that we must take swift action if we are to be part of an alternative solution. "Ask what Lebanon can do for Iraq today. Maybe

Terrorism does not bring more justice; it brings more bloodshed

Beirut, with its past experiences of war, has advice for Baghdad. Think of creative approaches."

In that same spirit, he said the US should be asked if occupying another country is fair or right.

"America fought for its independence, now how should the Arab world fight for its own?" he asked. "Arabs need to garner world support by creating a global campaign of equality... The task is to win dignity and create a society that is free from exploitation for all groups regardless of class, gender, religion or ethnicity."

It has been well over 50 years since the death of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi – better known as Mahatma Gandhi – but the lessons of his life are as important as ever. That was the message that his grandson, Rajmohan Gandhi, delivered to an attentive audience at the American University of Beirut's Issam Fares Hall.

"If M K Gandhi were alive today he would ask us to look for solutions that don't involve violence," said Gandhi, a scholar, author and activist in both the US and India.

"Terrorism does not bring more justice; it brings more bloodshed, more sorrow, and more tears. And where is this getting us today?"

Beyond anger... reflections on a calling

Niketu Iralu joined the IC International Council last October. He encountered MRA-IC 46 years ago and has worked with it on five continents. In recent years he has worked mainly in his homeland, Nagaland in northeast India. Nagas declared their independence in 1947 before the British left the subcontinent. Their fight for its recognition has continued ever since, costing hundreds of thousands of lives. Currently there is a ceasefire. Divisions amongst Nagas and persistent drug and alcohol abuse have taken a heavy toll. Niketu was recently asked to chair the Naga Reconciliation Commission to seek a new way forward. He writes about his calling:

My people, the Nagas, live on both sides of the Indo-Myanmar border. We, and other ethnic groups who are very much like us, were secure and undisturbed for centuries but are now reeling under the impact of changes coming from all sides.

The pressures from China that ethnic groups in Myanmar and Tibet face are matched by similar pressures on our side from India, Bangladesh and Nepal. Because of our fragile eco- and other life systems, many of us seem to be slowly accepting that we cannot escape what has happened to the na-

tive peoples in the Americas, Australia and New Zealand. The desperate struggles of the Nagas reflect our baffling crisis. The material, emotional and moral costs are immense. The carrot and stick measures adopted by the big powers in such situations to "solve the problem" increase our bitterness because they reveal weaknesses we do not want to face or are in no position to rectify. I ask myself, "Will we be able to learn in a very short time what others have taken a very long time to learn?"

I am fascinated by how God tried to

help Cain at the beginning of the story of man in the Bible. God asked, "Cain, why are you angry? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?" I know that when I reject a clear urging in my mind and conscience to do what needs to be done, anger and hatred is born in my heart.

As I look back I am amazed by God leading me to MRA-IC at college 46 years ago. I must have looked like Cain because I too was angry and insecure. I had concluded there was no answer to my fears and those of my people. Selfishness had become my main protection. Yet the simple challenge "to remake the world starting with myself" was too intriguing to be left untried.

God obviously sees my anger and helplessness as the starting point of honesty and change on my side. And He has stayed alongside me, going all out to help me do what is right and find my calling and happiness.

News round-up

Moscow

In December the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) hosted a symposium on global ethics, which was attended by over 100 professors, academic staff and graduates. One focus of their discussion was the Caux Round Table declaration on business ethics, and they invited Eduard Rosental, who first came to Caux in 1968, to speak on IC and answer questions. Two other academics, Andrei Zubov and Sergei Chugrov, also shared their impressions of IC. At the conclusion, a coordination group was formed to carry forward cooperation between the Institute and IC.

Geneva

In December Cornelio Sommaruga, President of Caux IC, spoke to two crowded international audiences in Geneva on *Switzerland after the federal elections; the world after the war in Iraq*. The first event was held in French, the second in English. At each of them, international civil servants, diplomats, retired ambassadors, friends of IC young and old, contributed to the lively discussion that followed Sommaruga's speech.

Commenting on the recent Swiss federal elections, Sommaruga expressed concern that Switzerland's unique political culture and values were under threat. He summarised these values as moderation, rigour, patience, a sense of balance, awareness of the scale of the country, and the importance of cohesion. He appealed for greater spirituality in politics, and for good governance inspired by ethical principles.

A working democracy, he went on, demands a heightened sense of responsibility among its citizens. "It is up to each of us," he said, "and to our organisations of civil society – religious, academic, humanitarian, economic – to shoulder our responsibility and participate in public life."

Sommaruga questioned the legitimacy of the armed intervention in Iraq by the United States and its allies without specific approval from the United Nations. At the start of this new century, he suggested, states and their governments no longer enjoyed a monopoly in foreign affairs. Those who are active in civil society should take up their responsibilities. "This globalisation of responsibility on an international level challenges us all as citizens and as individuals," he said.

In the animated discussion that followed, Sommaruga criticised the "evils of market fundamentalism". As an example of the "Caux approach", he cited the public dialogue in Caux in 2003 between leaders from the World Economic Forum (Davos) and the Porto Alegre World Social Forum – a dialogue without conflict that had revealed areas of convergence.

Korea-Japan forum

Since the 2002 IC conference at Odawara, collaboration has been developing between MRA-IC Korea and IC Japan. In December, 16 university students travelled to Korea to meet 16 of their Korean counterparts for the *First Korean and Japanese Youth Forum*. It was held at the National Youth Center of Korea, and sponsored by the Korean Government. We discussed the differences in our cultures and history, and asked how Korea and Japan can work together to help countries which need our support. We grew to understand each other deeply.

During this forum Suk Kyu Kang, Chairman of MRA-IC Korea, and Toru Hashimoto, Chairman of IC Japan, met in Seoul and discussed how IC in our countries could help conflict areas of the world.

We have decided to hold a similar forum twice a year, create a bilingual website, accept an invitation from the Indonesian IC team to work with them in August, and develop a Japan, Korea and China project. *Hiroshi Ishida and Park Yeoun-Kyoung*

Clean Africa campaign

An African proverb states that "If there is no head, the tail will not act." With this in mind, the *Clean Africa Campaign* launched a Leadership Training forum in Nairobi, Kenya in October. It brought together 39 people from nine countries, among them student leaders from universities in Kenya and Tanzania, and people working in conflict resolution, education, agriculture and environment.

James Mageria, former Vice President of World Vision for Africa, emphasised that leadership means working on values of accountability and transparency. Isaac Otieno, a graduate of *Foundations for Freedom*, now a well known political analyst in Nairobi, facilitated an interactive session on the current political leadership in Africa. Professor Cornelius Marivate from South Africa took the participants through a process of self-examination, pointing out that there can be no real achievement without moral integrity.

The next course will take place in South Africa in April.

Richmond, USA

Ten years of honest conversation on race, reconciliation and responsibility were marked in Richmond, Virginia at a breakfast forum for 650 people. "I have great hope for our city because of *Hope in the Cities*," said Mayor Rudolph McCollum, welcoming participants in the annual Metropolitan Richmond Day breakfast. "Today's
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Action for Life

The *Action for Life* team has now left Asia Plateau and is operating as three teams in the northern, eastern and southern areas of India, at the invitation of local IC groups. Each team has had a fascinating range of encounters. One went to Jamshedpur, home of Tata Motors, a firm which will export over 100,000 cars to the UK in the next two years. They stayed at the Tata Engineers Hall where they met young engineers and graduate trainees. At short notice the Chief Minister of the State, Jharkhand, asked to meet them. Four of the group jumped into cars with some of their hosts for the three-hour drive to the State capital, and a productive meeting with the Chief Minister.

Among the support groups for Action for Life have been Wal and Val Nuske from Wollongong, NSW. They write:

On arriving back in Wollongong after 12 weeks in India, we wondered where all the people were. The streets in India are always teeming. Each year India's population increases by 20 million – which is Australia's total population.

We were in India to support the *Action for Life* program. It was very rewarding to be associated with this very talented group, to participate in the training, and to work with them in Panchgani, Pune and Baramati. Also to meet many of the dedicated people who help at the IC conference centre, Asia Plateau, on a permanent or casual basis.

A few weeks ago, Sydneysider Barbara Lawler emailed many of us after seeing the PowerPoint presentation *An Introduction to Initiatives of Change*. She felt that the presentation underplayed the importance of the word "absolute" in describing the moral standards of honesty, purity, unselfishness and love, by omitting it from the slide whilst including it in the script. "For me, as a rebellious '60s generation baby boomer, the clarity of their description as 'absolute' was a refreshing challenge – like a light throughout and to the end of the tunnel," she wrote. "They articulated truths I knew in my heart and showed me the relevance of my life to the needs of the world. That turned my life around totally."

Why does she, and others, believe it important that the beacon of "absolute" is held high, even though it can never be reached?

In his essay on MRA-IC, *The spiritual movement from the West*, the well-known Russian philosopher Grigory Pomerants wrote: "The principles formulated by the Oxford Group could have ended up as one more system like a thousand others. But this did not happen. The factor preventing it was expressed – perhaps a little awkwardly – in the epithet "absolute". This epithet was the sign of movement, of action, of the inseparability of word and life, of the unthinkable of faith without works. From the very beginning the Oxford Group was not an ideology, not an organisation, but a

The challenge



of moral absolutes

by John Bond

movement of spiritual openness."

To me, he is saying that absolute values empower ordinary citizens, because we do not have to wait for some expert to tell us what is right and what is wrong. They are like the Southern Cross, which enables mariners to find out for themselves where they are going. If human society depends on a framework of absolute values to function harmoniously, then all of us can discover how to work for that.

This is the opposite view to that of the Minister of Health, Tony Abbott, who argued in *The Australian*, 23 Jan, that the morality which dictates national policy differs from that which dictates relationships between people.

The mariner never expects to reach the Southern Cross. And we would be foolish to think we are getting anywhere near living absolute moral

standards. But they challenge us to lift our game. I live in Canberra, and meet politicians who see themselves as decent people, forced by necessity to accept lying and cruelty. Recently I talked with one Federal Member who had read Mike Brown's book *No Longer Down Under*, a compilation of stories of Australians who have responded to MRA-IC's approach. "What a challenge that book is!" he said to me. He is now urging his party to rethink a policy which he regards as inhumane.

I can't just point the finger at politicians, when I know how easily I slip. But over the years I have learnt the satisfaction of putting all my energies into creating the kind of world I believe God means for us. That calls for a clear conscience, which means – among many other things – paying taxes honestly, and refusing to squeeze out of an awkward situation with a lie. It is worth it. As Secretary of the Journey of Healing, I frequently find myself treading delicate political territory. "Your strength," a former Cabinet Minister told me, "is the purity of your motives."

How do we offer the challenge of absolute moral standards without frightening people into thinking they demand an unreal standard of perfection? How do we show people that they are freeing, not cramping? I think we can do far better, and we need everyone's ideas. Anyone who wants to join the discussion is welcome to contact me (02) 6281 0940 or johnbond@netspeed.com.au.

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record crowd speaks volumes about *Hope in the Cities'* practical framework of principles and their impact on the lives of so many in this community," added James Dunn, president of the Chamber of Commerce and one of the breakfast co-chairs.

The keynote address was given by Valerie Lemmie, City Manager of Cincinnati. She described how she was using the principles of *Hope in the Cities* to tackle "by far the most difficult challenge" facing the leadership of America's cities: creating inclusive, just and constructive communities. Thirty local non-profit organisations and several major corporations supported the event which raised \$60,000 for the work of *Hope in the Cities*.

A quiet hero

Jim Coulter writes of his friend and fellow aviator Cliff Stringer:

In World War Two the "Pathfinders" were the elite of the aircrew. It was their job to find the target for the incoming bombers and to stay to guide them in. Consequently they had a high casualty rate, and most did not survive half an operational tour of duty. Cliff Stringer, who died in his Queensland nursing home last month, beat the odds by surviving not one but two tours.

Few who were taught by him knew that he had been awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross. He was very



conscious of those who had not survived the war and this perhaps was the source of his passion to enlist the younger generation to become pathfinders for a lasting peace.

His passion was music and he passed on his enthusiasm to his pupils in Bundaberg. He and his wife Lillian raised and trained the Sunshine Singers, which have since become an institution, enlisting several generations of students. Cliff and Lillian's concern for the world meant that over the years the efforts of the Sunshine Singers provided funds for the MRA conference centre, Asia Plateau, at Panchgani in India.