



Initiatives of Change
Australia

newsbriefs

Building trust across the world's divides

AUGUST 2021 NO. 312

Responding to crises—in Afghanistan and at home

We continue to find ourselves in turbulent times. The lockdown restrictions that are increasing across Australia can add a layer of stress to our lives. We need to be aware of this, for others as well as ourselves.

Meanwhile, the news from Afghanistan is haunting us all. We are constantly seeking news from Afghan friends in Afghanistan as well as those here, who are so deeply affected. We are also reminded of extremely challenging times continuing for others across the globe, including in Myanmar.

There is much to be done. At Initiatives of Change (IofC), we are used to asking ourselves, "What is my role?" and "How can I be of service?" When world events seem to overwhelm us, we can find ways to take bite-sized chunks—to decide, as Tolkien wrote, "what to do with the time that is given us."

At our last IofC community gathering, trade unionist Jim Beggs and his partner Tui Beggs, an IofC Elder, suggested that we write letters to our MPs to request that all Afghans on temporary visas in Australia immediately be granted permanent visas. Caroline Edwards from our IofC community in Western Australia has sourced a pro forma letter we can all use (see below). Of course, you may like to write your own or adapt this one.

Letters carry their own power, as factual and emotional appeals. It is important we understand that as part of their process, MPs must acknowledge letters received as direct concerns of their constituents. The more letters the better!

Change is a constant for IofC. This month, we warmly welcome Uncle Shane Charles, who has moved into Armagh, taking up a Cultural Residency with us. This is an exciting development as he will be working with us to develop our Trustbuilding Program, as well as guiding cultural integrity across all our initiatives. Come and meet Uncle Shane and community activist Leela Gray this Friday, 27 August, for a discussion on the current situation for First Nations youth. Uncle Shane will be yarning with us on the themes in the movie, *In My Blood It Runs*, including how we can counter systemic racism and support our First Nations colleagues and friends. It's not too late to get your ticket [here!](#)

In the early hours of this morning, I had a clear dream of a long, brown snake, slithering away from me. I read it as a release of fear and the things that bind us; a sense of opening to new growth. Opening to allow the life-giving, creative powers of the Rainbow Serpent to come.

With love and light,

Marg

Executive Officer, IofC Australia

FROM OUR COMMUNITY

Write a letter!

"Everyone here is numb. We don't know how to process this or react. We feel hopeless. Many of us have loved ones in Kabul and we desperately need to get our families out. This has proven once again that it is not safe for us to go back and not safe for our families.

What will it take for the Government to give us permanent protection? To enable us to bring our families here to safety once and for all? I am begging people to take action to force the Australian Government to do something."

— Quote from the Refugees Advice and Casework Service (RACS) website by Zaki Haidari, a Hazara refugee on a temporary protection visa in Australia

We invite you all to use the RACS template below to guide you through this letter writing process. Feel free to adapt this as you wish. Then send!

Hello/Dear [insert your MP's name]

I am writing to you as a concerned member of your constituency because I believe Australia must take action to alleviate the suffering of people from Afghanistan, given the escalating crisis the country now faces.

Australia can and must take the following actions.

1. Offer a one-off humanitarian intake of the most vulnerable people in Afghanistan, in addition to the current intake.
2. Grant all refugees from Afghanistan on temporary protection visas permanent protection, without the prospect of being returned to Afghanistan.
3. Enable refugees from Afghanistan to apply to reunite with their families.
4. Lift the ban on resettlement of refugees in Indonesia - The Australian government continues to block resettlement of refugees to Australia through the UNHCR if they registered in Indonesia after June 2014.
5. Work with our international partners to pressure the Taliban to take genuine steps toward peace and reconciliation.

This situation demands your urgent attention. Please consider the 5 actions and do everything you can to protect the people from Afghanistan at this time.

Time to show compassion

Shoshana Faire, Joyce Fraser and others from the Creators of Peace global community held a virtual circle of 38 women from 11 countries on Monday evening, 23 August, in solidarity with Afghan people. Shoshana and Joyce report on the evening:



"It was a privilege to hear two Hazara women share their sense of pain and betrayal. They see a need for an expression of anger at the international community's abandonment of Afghanistan.

Patricia Garcia, another participant, expressed her pain at seeing the country that she had lived in for so many years become so dangerous. Ruth Crowe apologized for our government's part in allowing the situation to unravel.

We shared emotions and tears. Serena Rix Tripathee held us beautifully, leading us to reflect on "How can I hold this?

What can I send? What's mine to do?"

We may each have a different answer to these questions. See our latest post on the lofC Australia website, [Afghanistan: Three Ways You Can Help](#) for ideas on how you can continue to help our Afghan friends overseas as well as here.

On his part, **Rob Wood**, long-term lofC worker and former host of the live-in community at Armagh, our Australia-Pacific Centre in Melbourne, wrote a letter to the press, calling on the Australian government to show compassion for genuine refugees who are on temporary visas in Australia. Here's the letter, published in *The Age* on Friday 20 August.

THE  AGE

Time to show compassion

My partner and I have watched with dismay the scenes of ordinary Afghans attempting to flee from the clutches of the Taliban. We know some of the Afghan community living locally and realise that their family members are among those in mortal danger.

As a gesture of magnanimity at this time of extreme crisis, could the Australian government grant permanency to those of Afghan background who are genuine refugees and have been in Australia for years but are still only on temporary visas. This would not only offer support to the immediate beneficiaries but might also be a reason for hope in a world that undoubtedly needs it.

Rob Wood, Wheelers Hill

Star of Taroom

The Star of Taroom is a specially-marked stone known as a 'groove stone'—a cultural artifact of the Iman people in the Upper Dawson River region in eastern Central Queensland. Removed from Country in the early 1970s, the Star finally went home this July.



lofCA Elder **Barbara Lawler**, Board member **Amiel Nubaha** and lofC friends in Queensland joined the Star of Taroom's journey back to its homeland in Iman country. It was a relay of over 500 km through the back blocks, pushing a specially-built handcart!

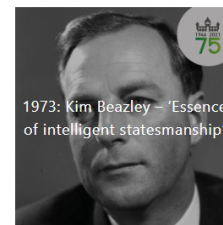
Organised by writer John Danalis, whose family held the stone for many years, the trek to return it brought First Peoples and non-Indigenous Australians together in a shared journey of respect.

'The return of this special stone highlights the healing and transformative power of repatriation, not just for individuals and communities, but for entire nations,' said Barbara.

FROM OUR INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

75 years of lofC at Caux

lofC Switzerland has launched a series of 75 stories celebrating the 75th anniversary of Caux as the European conference centre of the lofC worldwide movement. The stories paint a fascinating picture of lofC's legacy around the world. The latest post is on former Australian minister **Kim Beazley Sr.** Read the stories [here](#).



30 years of Creators of Peace

Congratulations to Creators of Peace, as the global network celebrates 30 years of peace building. Watch this [video](#) that pays tribute to all the work done through the years.

On 3 August, 200 women from around the world joined a Zoom session to celebrate the impact of their work and express gratitude to all who share the message of peace.

Anne Holland in Australia writes, "Thanks to all the inspiring women I have met in the lofC world. It's wonderful to meet women around the world; however,

I am particularly grateful to all the Australian women who have supported and cared for so many of us here. It's very humbling to see such dedication and commitment over the years, and exciting to see younger women following on."



Accompanying-Mentoring Program

lofC has a track record of effective accompanying-mentoring; offering support to people who have decided to practice honesty, integrity, and altruism into their workplaces, businesses, and local communities—those who feel called to be agents of change and want to grow in their own journeys towards that goal.

This new pilot program aims to expand the range of what is on offer. We are now formalising these relationships through an explicit application and matching process. This is to build lofC's capacity, both face-to-face and online, and provide greater access to accompanier-mentors. Accompanier-mentors and mentees from all over the world have signed up, and you can meet many of the accompanier-mentors [here](#).

Though the application closing date has passed, the Elders are aiming to build up the team of accompanier-mentors for future cycles during this pilot year. This two-way learning process is meant to be truly mentee-driven, starting with mentees being able to select an accompanier-mentor. If you would like to explore joining the accompanying-mentoring team, your enquiry will be most welcome via [email](#). You can read more about the program [here](#).



LATEST ON au.iofc.org



Coranderrk: Healing Ourselves and Country

The lofCA Trustbuilding team went to Coranderrk to learn more about how we can support First Peoples in acknowledging the truth of our shared history and work together for justice and healing in Australia. Initiatives of Change volunteers **Leela Gray** and **Gabby Harcourt** joined the team on the day. Here is their [story](#) in words and pictures.

In Conversation: Kelvin Brown, Tribal Elder of the Gamilaraay Nation

Kelvin Brown, an Elder of the Anaiwan people of the Gamilaraay nation, shared stories from his life with listeners at the monthly CoP gathering. Tales of his family life, growing up in an Aboriginal reserve, and his first encounters with spirits kept the audience captivated. Listen to a recording of the session [here](#).





The Annual Report for 2020/21 is out!

Our Annual Report for 2020-21 has photos and stories of how we have continued to travel together in a uniquely challenging year.

Read it [here](#).

See all news

GET INVOLVED

Yarning with First Nations about *In My Blood It Runs*: An evening with Uncle Shane Charles

Friday 27 AUGUST 2021 7.30 - 9.30 PM AEST online

Uncle Shane Charles is a proud Yorta Yorta, Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung man, and the Co-Chair of Reconciliation Victoria. He is La Trobe University's curriculum advisor and sits on numerous organization boards, including the City of Melbourne's.

On 27 August, **Uncle Shane will be on Zoom to yarn with us** about the present realities for First Nations youth, represented in the film, *In My Blood It Runs*.



He will be joined by **Leela Gray**, a Indigenous Studies student and community activist from Melbourne's western suburbs, who will contribute a youth perspective.

We invite you into our work of addressing systemic racism, by sharing the lived experiences of First Nations peoples.

Watch the film *In my Blood it Runs* ahead of time if you can, on a streaming platform of your choice. You can catch it on Netflix (free if you have a subscription), as well as on Google Play (\$4) or Apple TV (\$7).

If you're not able to watch it before the night, come along anyway! You'll still be able to join in this deep and relevant discussion with Uncle Shane.

The evening supports the co-design of our trustbuilding initiatives with First Nations leaders. Our work cultivates deep listening and truth telling, in places where trust has been broken with Australia's First Peoples.

Tickets: \$23 General \$18 Student/Concession

Get your ticket [via Eventbrite](#) and we will send you the Zoom link ahead of the event.

Creators of Peace Monthly Speaker Series

Saturday 4 September 2 - 4 PM AEST

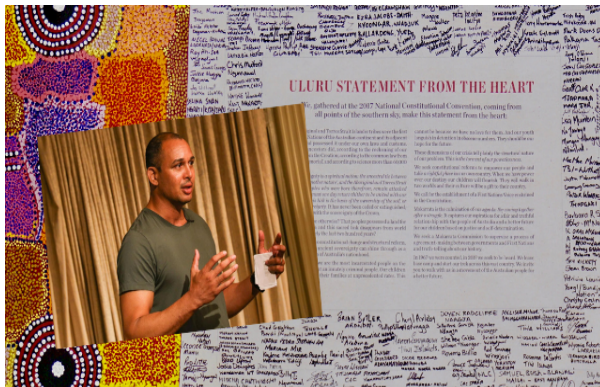
Tribal Elder **Kelvin Brown** returns to continue his conversation on First Peoples. Register [here](#) to receive the Zoom link.

Creating Space July 2021 Gathering

Monday 6 September 7 - 8.30 PM AEST

A monthly gathering for learning, journeying and sharing together. At this month's gathering **Caroline Edwards** will reflect on 'Perseverance and Faith.' Register [here](#) to receive the Zoom link.

A session with Thomas Mayor on the Uluru Statement



Tuesday 7 September 7.30 PM AEST

In March **Thomas Mayor**, signatory and advocate for the *Uluru Statement from the Heart*, launched IofC's 'Our Uluru Response' program at Armagh, presenting a challenging agenda of Voice, Treaty, Truth. **Where has it got to? What next steps can we take?**

During this 90-minute online forum Thomas will update us from Darwin on the national campaign, and introduce his new book *Dear Son: Letters and Reflections from First Nations Fathers and Sons*.

This is a free online forum, but [donations](#) to support our Our Uluru Response are welcome.

[Register here](#)

Creators of Peace Circle

Starts Wednesday 22 September, 7 - 9 PM AEST, for the first of seven sessions - SAVE THE DATE!

Join the next Creators of Peace Circle online! This is a series of meetings led by two trained facilitators, who invite participants to explore several different themes around the broader concept of peace.

The Circle will take place in seven two-hour sessions over seven weeks, from 7-9 PM each time. The sessions are scheduled for: 22 September, 29 September, 6 October, 13 October, 20 October, 27 October and 3 November.

More details of how to join will be available soon! For more information please email [Alex Childs](#), CoPA and Programs Coordinator.

Creative You!

An opportunity—through acting, dance, music, film and creative writing—to help develop items that can be part of a **Gala Entertainment Night on Saturday, 27 November at 8pm** in support of Armagh, lofC's national centre.

Due to the current lockdown in Victoria the organisers have had to postpone the scheduled workshops and have decided that the different groups will continue to work separately under the guidance of the group facilitator to produce items.

If you are interested in joining one of the groups, letting your creative potential loose and seeing it grow, please register [here](#) and we will get back to you with more details.

See all events

JOIN US

Show up. Take part. Volunteer. Give.

Help us build momentum for change.

Join our monthly [Creating Space](#) sessions for mindfulness and mutual support. **Take part** or help out with an upcoming program or event. **Follow us** on social media: more people will get to know us when you share and comment on posts—we want to hear from you!

You can always [contact us](#) to learn about opportunities to volunteer.

DONATE



We are currently raising funds for a new project, Tailoring Tales, to support Hazara women in Melbourne. We continue also to fundraise for our with First Nations communities—Our Uluru Response.

You can donate [here](#) or contact the [Treasurer](#) to send a cheque or make a bank transfer. Check out the options on our website—you can specify where you want your contribution to go.

Every donation, large or small, goes towards co-designing projects with the people and communities that we work with.

Donate Now



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226 Kooyong Road, Toorak, VIC 3142, Australia, au.iofc.org.
Contributions, news and comments are welcome, and can be sent to delia.paul@iofc.org.