

INITIATIVE IN DURBAN FOR COMMONWEALTH

Among the 120 NGOs who took part, the MRA stand at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Durban (12-15 November), with its large logo – MRA Initiatives for Change – and colourful eye-catching display, attracted a good deal of attention. A team of eight from South Africa and four from overseas, with a plentiful supply of publications, were on hand to meet people. Visits ranged from brief encounters with President Mbeki and Don McKinnon (the new Secretary-General of the Commonwealth) and Prince Philip to in-depth talks with students, diplomats, politicians, journalists and NGO activists. Some who had known MRA in the past introduced themselves. Others came intrigued to find out what it is. All of us were encouraged by the enthusiastic response. More than 100 left their names and addresses and asked to be kept informed. A report will be available by the end of the month from Campbell Leggat in London.

Campbell Leggat, Edward Howard

MALTA – MEDITERRANEAN MEDIATOR

'A Dialogue for the Mediterranean' took place from November 5-11 in a retreat house run by Jesuits, on top of a hill, in Malta. Inland, on the horizon, stood the medieval town of Mdina, once occupied by the Knights of St John. On the other side of the hill, terraced fields sloped gently down towards the distant town of Burgibba and the blue sea.

Twenty-eight from 14 countries in the Mediterranean region joined a formidable array of Maltese hosts – including the Deputy Prime Minister, a former President, several former Cabinet Ministers, priests, a nun, a trade unionist and academics. Questions ranged from 'overcoming prejudices' and the 'Western-Muslim divide' to 'how do we make the region reflect God's colourful tapestry and religions instead of conflicts and wars?'

Underlying the gathering was a palpable sense that its organisers, Bjørn-Ole and Josephine Austad, Charles and Kathy Aquilina and Dr Omnia Marzouk, had stretched themselves beyond conventional human planning, in faith that the event would be blessed by God. This helped to set the scene for profound sharing and courageous communication on painful and sensitive subjects. It is difficult to sum up. Someone commented that when God is present, differences become an asset in comprehending 'the whole' – and this became a conscious realisation for all of us at the dialogue.

Dr Nagia Abdelmogney Said, an Egyptian university lecturer who came on the first exchange visit of the British-Arab University Association in 1972, cited the

Hadith of the Prophet Mohammed: 'Whatever is of God continues and connects and flourishes'. The sense of connectedness that developed between participants indicated that the dialogue had indeed been blessed. 'When something is right for everyone,' someone said, 'it is a sign of God's will.'

Dr Said brought with her a small prayer rug, made from recycled cloth and woven by women in a Cairo mosque. Instead of using it herself, she offered it to the group – a symbol of the Mediterranean region reflecting God's colourful tapestry. The rug was placed in the middle of the meeting room. Dr Said added that it was a 'sign of hope and trust in the future' when the eight-month old baby of two of the participants sat on the rug and shrieked with delight!

Some years ago the Pope said, 'My hope is that Malta will continue in what I would call a natural mission ... (to be a) mediator among peoples of the entire Mediterranean basin.' The Dialogue demonstrated that there are solid grounds for such hope.

Alan Channer

FAITH IN ISRAEL

Bryan Hamlin and Rabbi Dr Marc Gopin have just spent nine days in Israel. They based in Jerusalem, working with religious teacher Yehezkel Landau, and visited people in nine cities and towns. Bryan writes:

We went with the conviction that religion, the cause of much of the Middle East's conflicts, holds the key to their resolution. Western governments, and many local political leaders, tend to see religion as a problem. We believe that the best values of the three Middle Eastern faiths – Judaism, Christianity and Islam – are needed to better relations between Arabs and Israelis; and that even in groups that appear extreme, such values can be found and encouraged, and can lead to the right kind of dialogue. We discovered a surprising amount of dialogue between religious Jews and Muslims. On the other hand, the mistrust between secular and religious Jews, and between secular and religious Muslim Palestinians, causes serious divides. There is increasing tension too between Muslim and Christian Palestinians.

We visited the Shalom Hartman Institute, a distinguished think-tank rooted in traditional Judaism, and met the director and founder, Rabbi Dr David Hartman, and other scholars. Rabbi Gopin gave a seminar at the Yakar Institute, where traditional scholars and rabbis are engaged in scriptural text discussions with Muslims. We visited the Bethlehem Bible College and met the President, Dr Bishara Awad, and went to the only college of Islamic studies in Israel, at Baqa Al-Gharbieh. This college is ten years old and has 400 students, 87% of them women.

A group of these women, in traditional Islamic dress, expressed their frustration that because of their dress, many assumed they were terrorists or in sympathy with such things. They engaged Rabbi Gopin in a profound discussion on the Islamic resources on ethics, peace and conflict.

We also met with faculty from ten other institutes and universities. We felt privileged to meet people, Jewish, Muslim and Christian, for whom respect for the other, and work for peace and justice, are all consistent with their faith.

Bryan Hamlin

CCBI IN RZESZOW, POLAND

The second East-West Conference on business ethics took place in the Polish city of Rzeszow last month. It was initiated by Polish participants in the Caux Conferences for Business and Industry. During the three days, 80 people took part. Most were Polish, and others came from England, Finland, Kenya, Slovakia, Sweden, the Netherlands and Ukraine. We heard a challenging address by French/Polish journalist Bernard Marguerite on 'the role of values in a period of transformation'. A wide range of issues was discussed, including: 'Responsibility and cooperation'; 'Work and human dignity'; 'Business and its surroundings'; 'Relations between management and labour'; 'Small business'. And we were entertained by students of the Rzeszow Music school, who played during the intervals between conference sessions.

The conference again took place in the town hall in the old centre of Rzeszow. It was opened by the Governor and Marshal of the Sub-Carpathia Province and by the Mayor of the city. The priest of the Holy Cross church, who participated in the conference, held a special mass for it, which was broadcast on local radio. Local TV featured the conference, and the press carried several articles. At the end, many participants spoke in warm appreciation, and a Polish businessman urged each participant to bring at least one other person to the next conference.

A short conference report will be available soon and can be obtained from the organisers:

*Jeremy Kalkowsky, Piotr Strek, Wanda Tarnawska
and Kees Scheijgrond*

VISION AND VALUES FOR EUROPE

On November 6, 60 people from different walks of life met in Schengen, a wine-making village of 400 inhabitants situated in the three-borders country between France, Germany and Luxembourg. They included the Mayors of six neighbouring towns, a member of the Luxembourg Parliament, and a member of the European Parliament from the Saarland. They had come together to discuss, 'Where does Europe go?' and 'What values for Europe?' *Changer* will carry a report in its next issue.

Schengen was chosen because in June 1985 the 'Schengen Agreement' was signed, a decisive step

towards the free circulation of people and goods in Europe. It took effect in March 1995, and many have already benefited from a 'Schengen visa'.

The idea for this meeting came from discussions with Polish and British friends and members of the Euro-Parliament, and through seeing the results of the EU elections last June. With our team in Lorraine, we asked ourselves: 'What can we do for Europe from our region?' With the full support of the three border towns, we launched into this initiative.

Through these exchanges, we are trying to initiate an answer to Czech President Vaclav Havel's comments to the European Parliament in 1994. He deplored the lack of a moral and spiritual dimension to our society, and made an appeal for a 'spiritual identity accessible to all citizens' through a charter, a kind of a moral contract between all Europeans.

Charles and Juliette Danguy

FISHING IN AUSTRALIA

Somali peacemaker Yusuf Al-Azhari is in Australia, and has visited six cities. Hundreds of Somalis have come to hear him, and have been heartened by his news that governance has been restored to two of their country's five States. This has also caught the attention of the Department of Foreign Affairs and aid agencies, which have arranged a number of meetings and seminars for him. He has met leaders of Australia's fishing industry, and there is serious interest in helping to restore Somalia's fisheries.

Everywhere, Dr Al-Azhari has shared his experience of 'finding God in hell' (as *The West Australian* headlined its interview with him), and his commitment to rebuild his country on the basis of forgiveness.

Reconciliation is a hot issue in Australia, and he has brought fresh insight into what it takes to be a reconciler. His whole approach has exploded many stereotyped views of Islam. The response can be seen in the initiatives now being undertaken by individuals and agencies to send medicines and educational material to Somalia. He now goes to New Zealand, then Malaysia.

John Bond

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL UPDATE

Since our September letter, we have been journeying to get to know the world work as personally as we can.

- three of us have been to the Meeting of the Americas in Brazil, with visits also to Argentina, Paraguay and Colombia;
- two went to Sweden for a weekend gathering convened by several younger couples to think about their country, and for talks with others of our team;
- seven of us spent ten days in Paris giving further thought to our work, and meeting with the younger team and with senior figures in French public life;
- we then went to Berlin and Leipzig for a remarkably interesting visit; we met over two days with some of our team in Germany; we observed the capital city

being reborn in spectacular manner, and politicians in both government and opposition gave us insights into the hopes and difficulties of a newly integrating society and their perspectives on world affairs.

– three have been in Haguenau for the gathering to plan for Caux 2000.

At the end of January we will all meet in Panchgani for our next round of thought and planning, followed by the global consultation. Then we will split up again, some making visits through Asia and others going to Washington for discussions with a widely-based group of people knowledgeable on world affairs.

With our warm greetings,

*Ailsa Hamilton, James Hore-Ruthven, Pieter Horn,
Suresh Khatri, Ren-jou Liu, Ashwin Patel,
Anne-Marie Tate, Peter Thwaites*

APPRECIATION FOR OUTPOURING

In the September WB I wrote about our need to be open to new priorities for MRA in the new millennium. Two responses pointed out that I seemed to belittle the years that many older full-timers devotedly put into serving in poor nations.

My deepest apologies as I did not mean to convey that at all. There is only appreciation in my heart for the outpouring by these people.

Suresh Khatri

HELP US GIVE TO THE WORLD

Suresh's initial contribution and the three responses provoke these thoughts:

Ever since the advent of technology our world has been one of paradoxes – it is both a shrinking village and a fragmented house. The 'rich world – poor world' divide is one such paradox and an important one. Technology alone will not reduce the disparity.

In the last era politics kept the world divided. Now, unless business finds genuinely unselfish goals, it will just exploit the weak nations. One of MRA's prime thrusts now should be to involve world business in eradicating poverty not by hand outs but by adopting policies of development for the less fortunate world. It means accepting that the purpose of business is to change society. 'Rich world MRA' and 'poor world MRA' will have to work together on this.

Many from the 'rich world MRA' have given years to our poor nations. While their work was selfless and helped many like me to find new life – for which I am most appreciative – they came primarily to 'give'. It seems to me that few thought there was much to learn from Indian culture. Yet the spirituality of the East can evolve an ideology that could counter the onslaught of materialism.

For this reason I am glad that the 'consultations 2000' are being held at Asia Plateau. Apart from thinking 'for' our region, can the consultations focus on salient points of the Eastern philosophies? Help us give to the world.

We need to use Asia Plateau a lot more for all of Asia and for the rest of the world. The world, especially the 'rich world MRA' has a responsibility to involve us and be involved in us. With the Indian economy opening up, an avalanche of material goods is flooding in. This is bound to bring the materialism that has devastated the West. Help from Westerners who can articulate their experience of confrontation with the ugly face of materialism will go a long way.

After the Panchgani consultations we from Bangalore would like a strong team to visit us for at least a week. We intend to have a seminar of leading men from Bangalore's business houses. Our conviction is that business, more than any other section, will shape the future of India.

Please could any who can come to Bangalore let me know, and give me something of your background (ravirao@vsnl.com) to enable us to make adequate preparations. I will work it out with Bhanu and others who are co-ordinating the consultations. We assure you of a fruitful time and a grateful Bangalore.

Ravindra Rao

TRANSFORMATION – THE ROOT OF MRA

At a recent UK MRA National Weekend in Tirley we looked at priorities for the next five years. By the end we had agreed on three main foci – to foster a new fellowship of young people, to enable people of different faiths to work together and, crucially, to clarify what MRA is.

Erik Andren submitted a paper on this last point. He wrote, 'Due to the lack of some globally agreed core clarities, we have obscured what MRA should be doing! We have gradually moved the locus of our work from cause to effect, from transforming people to what transformed people can do, and created a fog.' I think that Erik is right that a lot of people are in a bit of a fog about what MRA is. This tends to undermine our confidence.

I had just come from Liverpool, where three co-workers and I spoke in ten schools. Several teachers told me how impressed they were by the confidence of the co-workers. I think this comes from their clarity on what they are trying to achieve with the students.

As I see it the heart of MRA is Frank Buchman's experience in Keswick. He found a transformation which gave freedom of spirit. That was passed on to others, who also found transformation. This in turn had an impact on society.

To me it is this experience that is the root of MRA. Many have found this transformation, freeing them from such things as hate, fear and greed. Buchman interpreted this in Christian terms – an experience of the Cross. A Muslim or a Hindu would interpret it differently. We can accept differing interpretations while uniting on the importance of the transformation.

During interactive sessions with Sixth Form groups we often ask students to say what is wrong in society. Given a response like 'racism', we explore with them the root of this problem, and help them to see that unless we can change the wrongs in our own natures,

we are dealing with symptoms, not with the cause.

The co-workers then share their inner struggles and give examples of finding inner freedom. In this way we try to awaken in the students a desire for inner transformation for their own sakes, not just because society needs it.

From our experience in scores of Sixth Forms, young people respond to this approach. So it fits with the first aim that our National Weekend identified. This focus on the transforming experience, rather than its interpretation, also offers people of all faiths an opportunity to work together – our second aim.

So my 'mission statement' is: 'For the sake of society and the individual, people need to change.'

Howard Grace

AFRICA TODAY ON ALLAN GRIFFITH'S BOOK

Africa Today carried a full page review by Patrick Adibe of Allan Griffith's book, *Conflict and Resolution*, in its August edition. He describes the book as 'a good descriptive study of the processes that culminated in self-determination (for Zimbabwe, Namibia and Cambodia)...rich and informative...an excellent portrayal of the role of superpower rivalry and geopolitics in determining the character and outcome of these diplomatic processes.' The book is available from New Cherwell Press, 7 Mount St, Oxford OX2 6DH, UK.

SURFERS VISIT WEBSITE

The number of people visiting the MRA and *For A Change* websites recently exceeded 1,200 per week. The most popular of our webpages are those which deal with the history of MRA.

Mike Smith

FACTS ON FAXES, PHONES AND ADDRESSES

Australia: John and Celia Farquharson now have tel/fax: +61 2 6236 3204 and

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Calendar of Events

NOV '99	<u>Rzeszów Poland</u>	Second International East-West conference on business ethics	Nov 4 - 6
NOV '99	<u>Malta</u>	Dialogue for Mediterranean region	Nov 5 - 10
NOV '99	<u>Schengen Luxembourg</u>	One-day seminar 'Où allons-nous en Europe?' – organised by families and local leadership of the east of France	Nov 6
NOV '99	<u>Haguenau France</u>	Caux 2000 planning meeting	Nov 10 - 15
DEC '99	<u>Sydney Australia</u>	A conference to mark the new century	Dec 3 - 7
DEC '99	<u>Asia Plateau India</u>	'Challenge of the new millennium : Confrontation or Collaboration?' – four-day leadership program for Trade Union leaders	Dec 15 - 19
DEC '99	<u>Asia Plateau India</u>	'Education Today, Society Tomorrow' – leadership program for school teachers	Dec 20 - 24
DEC '99	<u>Asia Plateau India</u>	Youth Camp to mark the new Century	Dec 28 - Jan 4
FEB 2000	<u>Asia Plateau India</u>	MRA Global Consultation	Feb 4 - 11
FEB 2000	<u>Melbourne Australia</u>	Effective Living Course	Feb 6 - Apr 8
MAY 2000	<u>Kampala Uganda</u>	All Africa conference for Moral Re-Armament	TBA
JUN 2000	<u>Cameroon</u>	Family Forum	Jun 1 - 4

The deadline for the next Bulletin is Wednesday, 15 December, 1999

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