

THE JAMAICA CONSULTATION: April 23-30, 1998

Preparing for 2000

REPORT

Dear Friends,

We stepped off our airplanes into the warmth of a Jamaican welcome by the local MRA team and representatives of Sir Howard Cooke, the Governor General, who had invited us to hold the World Consultation in his country. His conviction is that MRA is meant to be an instrument of truth reaching out to the world and its leaders, inspiring them to become agents of the change the world so desperately needs.

The Consultation took place in a hotel at Runaway Bay - an evocative reference to the part slavery played in Jamaica's history. Situated on the northern coast, we overlooked the turquoise Caribbean - Cuba a mere 90 miles over the horizon. Christopher Columbus was shipwrecked nearby in 1494. Bushes and trees give birth to an amazing variety of flowers, and the nights are filled with the buzz of crickets and the piping of frogs.

The first days of the consultation were rainy and gray, though warm - but that was a blessing for the country which has been experiencing a severe drought. However, on the day of our outing, the sun was set against a blue sky, and the afternoon of sightseeing became a taste of paradise, arranged for us by Sir Howard and the Jamaican Tourist Board: waterfalls, beaches, flower gardens, and a reception with local dignitaries.

Our meetings and smaller discussions required both our hearts and our minds. We were a diverse group - 38 people from 22 countries - with Sir Howard taking part in several meetings and three-month-old Theo Nelson listening in, having brought his mother and grandfather along. We came from many backgrounds, with varied concerns and viewpoints, and diverse written contributions from around the world. But we grew together as a group and learned as we worked. And as our lively debates resulted in something we could all wholeheartedly agree on, we are filled with an expectant sense that we have been given something which can prepare us all for the next century.

Main conclusions

Spiritual renewal will always be central to MRA's life and work. We are all responsible for this renewal in ourselves and in those around us. This responsibility cannot be devolved on to the shoulders of a few. As we gathered, we realized that our greatest need was to seek unity of heart and openness to each other and to build a shared global vision. This was not easy. Some of us came carrying the heart-ache of divisions between close friends and colleagues. We became more conscious, through sharing times and private conversations, of a need for deep change leading to 'a clean slate' - a process that needs to continue world-wide. As trust grew, it became possible to consider different ways of doing things without being bound by fears and hurts. The result was a gift beyond our expectations. Mona Marzouk quoted from the Sufi tradition: 'The spark of God's mercy can turn anything into spring water.'

We rejoiced at remarkable new outreaches through various MRA initiatives (as described vividly in the advance papers - still available on request from *World Bulletin* distributors), and the hope for the future that they represent. Like petals of a flower, they open out to the world and draw people to the life-changing heart of our work. Nourished by the common stem of our spiritual life, they enhance each other.

John Graham of the Giraffe Project (encouraging people to 'stick their necks out' - take risks) helped us

to use our hearts and imaginations before our heads to envision how MRA might look in the future. As one said, 'Memories restrict; imagination liberates.' Another exercise enabled each person to recognize him or herself as a leader, thus helping remove the threat we sometimes feel when asked to accept or offer leadership. This allowed us to look with fresh eyes at the need to give coherence and direction to the work. John's advice to anyone considering taking leadership was the Chinese proverb that 'it is dangerous to try to leap a canyon in two bounds!'

We realized that MRA may be missing historic opportunities because, however perceptive many of our number may be individually, we have inadequate collective means of recognizing opportunities and focusing attention and resources on agreed priorities. By listening carefully, particularly to those with different viewpoints than one's own, we came to a united conviction that clearer leadership is vital to our global work. **We believe that a new International Coordinating Council (ICC) should be entrusted with this service.** Details are outlined in the attached working document. The ICC would replace the current International Coordination Group.

Directly linked to this recommendation is a commitment to work more closely together at all levels, from the local to the global. MRA must begin where we live and work, with families and colleagues, 'in conversations with the other, where both learn and find something new,' as one expressed it. Some spoke of a longing for 'living cells of friends' connected to national and international teams and to the Consultation process. In order to achieve this we must greatly improve our communications so that everyone has adequate access to information, and can make their contribution.

One of the tasks of the ICC, far from stifling grassroots initiatives, would be to seek out and support promising areas of growth, and where appropriate, link them to our existing outreach programs. There is also considerable potential for fruitful 'cross-fertilization' between the different programs.

Leadership - past, present and future

We began our consideration of leadership with a review (by Ailsa Hamilton) of how it had developed since people first started to gather around Frank Buchman in the early 1920s. Through the early years of the Oxford Group, his leadership was based on the moral authority of his seniority, experience, vision, faith, flair and contacts. Later, after a stroke, when he was not so mobile, others communicated his convictions. When he died, he left a work which was in many ways very effective, but which had developed some tensions. In Peter Howard, people again found a leader they were happy to follow because he had thought farther and deeper than they had, and he was able to architect some great global moves. However, he died just four years after Frank Buchman.

Buchman had once said he hoped that after his death a collective leadership would emerge. It was not an easy assignment. The tensions that had developed near the end of Buchman's life had persisted under the surface during Howard's leadership, fraying the trust necessary to hold together a large global enterprise. Differing visions and viewpoints led to division. Some, principally in the United States, concentrated efforts on reaching young people. The main thrust of MRA continued under an informal collective leadership of those with the calling and courage to give it. It was selfless but it had flaws. As it was informal, it was unidentifiable except to those who were 'in the know.' And as it was not legitimated by the participation and conviction of our world community, not everyone felt obliged to pay attention. On the other hand, people began to take more individual responsibility, and many different initiatives grew up.

So these two trends - of many different initiatives and 'not-strong' leadership - created a danger of fragmentation, and at a certain point it became clear that something had to be done.

Philippe Lasserre took up the story from 1988, where Ailsa left off, when a decision was made to hold Global Consultations, leading later to the creation of the International Coordination Group. The ten years since then have seen the rapid growth of globalization, the end of the Cold War, the

communications revolution (from fax to e-mail), and a move towards transparency and democracy.

In terms of international MRA leadership, the Consultations responded to the isolation of national teams. Though the Consultations have seldom led to strategic decisions or action, they have given orientations: a visit to Taizé after the 1989 Consultation on Eastern Europe re-emphasized the importance of spiritual nourishment; the next two in Tokyo and Panchgani affirmed MRA's multi-cultural and multi-faith character; 1991 identified 33 areas of responsibility in running Caux, which led to a much broader international team; 1992 in Ottawa on finances started a process towards greater recognition and visibility of MRA's legal bodies; 1993 in Cyprus worked out a mission statement and decided to make Caux's 50th anniversary a major event. Attending them also made a growing number of people (approximately 200) aware of the need to be responsible for the whole work of MRA.

However, Philippe said, these ten years have also been marked by weaknesses that compel us now to address the question of leadership in a new way. These years have seen the gradual loss of friends who worked with Buchman and Howard, a diminishing of the number of full-time workers, and little generational renewal in many areas. Collective leadership by consensus has been too soft a leadership, and has been accompanied by a lack of global vision. Except for the International Coordination Group, MRA has no elected or appointed or generally recognised international leadership. For these and other reasons, Philippe concluded, there is a call in some quarters for a stronger, recognized leadership.

We went on to ask ourselves what kind of leadership we need for the future, listing in turn our needs, fears, hopes and the qualities it would require.

We felt there was a need to do better in specific areas: communication; overall direction; public expression; identification of new opportunities; setting priorities; training and development; ways of resolving disputes; encouraging spiritual growth.

Our fears were of: human control; domination by strong personalities; loss of national sovereignty; threat to individual inspiration; bureaucracy; cultural uniformity; established hierarchy; group-think; inability to build unity; dominance of white, male, Christian or Anglo-Saxon thinking; lack of accountability or acceptance.

Our hopes were for: servant leadership; 'light' leadership; mobility; flexibility; vision; impartiality; humility; trustworthiness; world perspective; sense of strategy; capacity to co-opt/delegate; spiritual and psychological insight; courage; compassion; godliness; more effective life-changing; corporate responsibility for past mistakes; receptiveness to criticism; decisiveness.

And we felt the needed abilities include: character judgment; capacity to absorb information and analyze; fund-raising skills; ability to turn enemies into friends; the practice of prayer and listening.

Through these days of honest talking and listening carefully to each concern, we found we were growing towards a common concept, which we outline at the end of this report.

Further recommendations

Universal statement on MRA for the internet (see appendix)

The final draft of the introductory text for the MRA website, which had already been circulated widely, was amended and **unanimously agreed**. As more people worldwide are learning about MRA via the internet, it was critical to agree upon text describing the work of MRA that would have universal appeal. The text (which could also be adapted for other use) will be linked to other sections of MRA's site including: how to start the process of personal change, a full history of MRA and Frank Buchman's work, plus fuller stories and examples. In a few weeks, visit <www.mra.org.uk>.

An international association of MRA legal bodies

We recommend that the meeting of MRA national boards in Caux in July carry forward ideas relating to the possible formation of an international MRA association. Such an association would:

- 1) provide a framework that would enhance the multi-faith dimension of our work;
- 2) strengthen the relationship between MRA and international bodies such as the UN;
- 3) set standards for recognizing the legitimacy of existing and newly-created MRA bodies who seek affiliation with the international association;
- 4) facilitate the raising and distribution of funds internationally.

We would be grateful if national bodies could consider this proposal, and how they would relate to such an international association, before the July meeting.

New name for MRA

We had hoped to clarify next steps in the process of discerning whether or not MRA's name should be changed. The variety of views world-wide was reflected within a subcommittee during the Consultation. However, our focus on other issues left no time to take the matter further. We therefore decided to ask a working group, including John Bond who has so far led the international exchange on the subject, **to research further and bring its recommendations to the next Global Consultation.**

World Congress

There was further discussion to clarify the concept and advisability of an MRA 'world congress'. Friends in India have extended a warm welcome for such an event to take place in the Asia Plateau conference centre, Panchgani. It could be a time of team-building, celebration and exploration of the ideas and life needed to shape the coming century. There is a particular wish to include those who rarely have the opportunity to attend our international conferences. Discussions will continue.

Next Global Consultation

Many of the Consultations until now have focused necessarily on internal issues. Our hope is that in the future, the emphasis will be on the major needs and opportunities in the world. We suggest that the next Consultation look at ways in which our outreach initiatives might connect more effectively with each other and with other inspired initiatives. Several people expressed the conviction that a Consultation in South Africa would be timely and could provide an opportunity for our international team to support that country at this vital moment. Sam Pono and Conrad Hunte will explore this thought with their team. Others expressed a desire for a Consultation and action in Washington. Norway and Malaysia were also offered as possible sites for future gatherings.

Global priorities

Our host, Sir Howard Cooke, joined us several times during the week to listen and to lead (see appendix). He asked for support in visiting leaders in **the Caribbean** with the message of change - to which we responded wholeheartedly. He also proposed the establishment of an MRA center in the Caribbean to support the growing interest and need there. The potential of the region was emphasised during a two-day programme in Kingston after the Consultation, during which we were guests of the MRA team. Sir Howard, as well as receiving us in the Governor General's residence, hosted a formal breakfast with speakers, attended by about 60 Jamaicans from many sections of national life. Conrad Hunte, who was main guest speaker, also spoke to us earlier of his hopes to mobilize a team in the area in the next few years.

Forty voices joined in the national anthem of **South Africa** on April 27, the fourth anniversary of the end of apartheid. The same unity was echoed the following day when Sam Mxolisi Pono, on behalf of the MRA team in South Africa, asked for international support in the form of a small team to reach the leadership of the country. Joseph Karanja spoke of the all-Africa conference that is to take place in **Kenya** later in May.

Ren-Jou Liu outlined a proposal from the recent **Asia-Pacific** regional consultation in Panchgani to invite young people to give a year to work with MRA. They would spend the first three months training together in Panchgani, the next three months in an Indian city, and then be available for the rest of the year to work in any situation at the invitation of MRA groups anywhere in the world. The programme would operate from the year 2000 to 2004.

We agreed on **Caux's important role** as an instrument for the world work of MRA into the next century. Marianne Spreng told about the questionnaire that has been sent out widely to assess the present situation and future prospects in each of the 33 departments needed to run the centre. She shared her hope that those coming to help will do so out of a sense of joyful conviction, and that no one need come out of duty or fear that one aspect of the work would otherwise not be covered. 'If we take on the people and tasks God has put on our hearts,' she said, 'I am convinced that he will look after the other needs, and that no one will have to work too hard or too long hours. Just as he led us to find the Hotel Management School whose renting of the centre between conferences brings income which helps to cover some of the costs of maintaining the building, he will show new ways of working in many parts of that big home in the coming years.'

We also heard from Mona Marzouk about the **Special Caux Week** (July 23-30, 1998) on 'Life-Faith-Fellowship.' It will be a time for those committed to MRA to stimulate and enrich their spiritual and corporate life. We are all asked to consider with our local teams who should participate in what will be an important part of the continuing process of spiritual renewal.

Onwards and upwards...

On the final morning of the Consultation, we shared an immense feeling of gratitude for the way in which we had been led. Many spoke of a renewed or deepened sense of calling and a heightened expectancy. One person said he had observed an 'evident will to work together, and to submit personal concerns to God's will.' Another spoke for several when he said, 'I go back an entirely different person.' We look forward to meeting and talking with as many as possible in our various parts of the world, and seeking together how to carry this process forward.

With warm greetings,

Frédéric Chavanne (France), Anna Christine Christensen (Denmark), Neville Cooper (UK), Sonia Copeland (Jamaica), Rob Corcoran (USA), Maarten de Pous (Netherlands), Steve Dickinson (USA), Amina Dikedi (Nigeria), Ed Espiritu (Philippines), Chris Evans (UK), John Graham (USA), Karen Greisdorf (USA), Ailsa Hamilton (UK), Bryan Hamlin (USA), Glennis Holden (Australia), Joan Holland (New Zealand), Conrad Hunte (Barbados/South Africa), Bhanu Kale (India), Joseph Karanja (Kenya), Suresh Khatri (Fiji), Jonathan Lancaster (Australia), Philippe Lasserre (France), Claire Leggat (New Zealand/UK), Ren-Jou Liu (Taiwan), Omnia Marzouk (Egypt), John Moore (USA), Haridas Nair (Malaysia), Camilla Nelson (Norway), Edward Peters (UK), Phillip Phinn (Jamaica), Sam Pono (South Africa), Luis Puig (Brazil/Guatemala), Peter Riddell (UK), Dick Ruffin (USA), Marianne Spreng (Switzerland), Ernesto Veras (Brazil), Richard Weeks (Canada), Jens Wilhelmsen (Norway)