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Dear Friends,

The fifth Consultation on matters relating to MRA's global operations took place February 16-22 in the beautiful setting of Asia Plateau. The situation in the Gulf formed the background. Many had flown north of the war zone, passing over the Soviet Union and Afghanistan to reach Bombay. All felt gratitude that we were able to meet at this time. The twenty-four of us represented fourteen countries, Muslim and Christian, Hindu and Buddhist.

As we reflected on events in the Gulf, the chaos in the Soviet Union, and the needs of Western society, we were reminded of Buchman's words: Unless we deal with human nature thoroughly, drastically, on a colossal scale, nations will follow their historic road to violence and destruction.

Daily times of interfaith prayer each evening helped to draw us closer to God, to each other and to our world team. Many expressed a sense of our being engaged in a common spiritual search. As one put it, We are called to do a work where there are no models. We have to rely on spiritual experience.

We reviewed the consultative process of the last two years, beginning in Chantilly, France, where blockages of fear and prejudice were removed, enabling us to respond in a wholehearted way to the opportunities which developed in Eastern Europe. One person said that going to Latin America for the Consultation last spring was like opening a new room in the house. I hope that a lot more rooms will be opened here.

In this spirit we approached the question of our different faiths, hoping particularly that the non-Muslims might gain a deeper understanding of Islam. We could not help but be amazed at God's timing in giving this thought a year ago. For us all, it was an education of the heart and the mind; a time of honesty as we unpeeled layers of suspicion, prejudice and simple ignorance. It is most painful, said Dr. Ayman ElMohandes, an Egyptian doctor living in Washington, but this moment of self revelation and compassion is essential. Compassion is the great healer.

We rejoiced at what God has given through Asia Plateau and the growing team who feel responsible for the work in India. We felt that Asia Plateau is meant to become increasingly a centre for the whole world, and not only for Asia. Some new visions were given for its future in the light of global needs.

Rajmohan Gandhi joined us for two days, coming from the political turmoil in New Delhi, and shared his insights on the current scene in India. He and Sushobha Barve enlightened us on aspects of the Hindu faith and the background to the current conflicts in the nation. We were delighted to hear from Vilma Maritz, the first South African Afrikaaner to come to India in many years, and grateful also for the chance to get an update from those from Taiwan and Hong Kong.

As the work of MRA has taken root in different cultures, it has become essential to find appropriate ways of expressing our message for all cultures. We continued discussions begun at previous meetings on this issue.

The following pages will, we hope, capture the essence of our discussions, and of the conclusions we reached. However, as one of our number noted, *The results of our time here may be intangible. The aim of our work may be more in the realm of healing of deep hurts than in practical reconstruction. The temptation is to move into the political and economic as the deeper things seem so difficult to deal with. How do we help governments which are so ill-equipped to deal with the healing of history? The only thing we have to offer is personal experience.*

At our final meeting one participant said, *I came burdened by and despairing about world events. I leave with hope because I found compassion in people, healing of my hurts and a renewed optimism in the power of change.*

Perhaps the spirit of the Consultation is best conveyed by a prayer written by one of the Muslims present:

*God, help us to open our hearts to you, and in so doing to one another. Help us accept each other as you have accepted us, with all our faults. Remove all arrogance from our hearts towards one another, for in our love for you only humility prevails.*

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Australia: - Mayor; Pacific, - Leggat; Asia: Philippines - Cardel; South - V. Subrahmanyam; Malaysia - Haridas; Japan - Fujita; Africa: East - Patel; South - Horn; Zimbabwe - Sibare; Nigeria, Rest - I. Amata; N. America: Canada - Weeks; USA - Ruffin; Latin America: Argentina - Gallicchio; Brazil - Puig; Central America - Molina; Rest - Puig, Vogel; Europe: France - Lasserre; Germany - Spoerri, BrBckle; Netherlands, Rest - J. de Pous; Scandinavia - Soderlund; Switzerland, Austria - Spreng; UK - Wise, Hore-Ruthven; Middle East: - Grandy

## ASIA PLATEAU

We traced the bold steps that led to the opening of Asia Plateau in 1968, the industrial seminars and the dialogues on development. The two hundred thousand trees (some 60-80 feet high) that surround the buildings, the glorious gardens and the spacious buildings are a tribute to the vision and hard work that many people have put in. Last year there were 16 seminars or conferences and over one hundred day programmes during the eight month season.

Industry: Stan Shepherd recalled the first industrial seminar in 1975. Returning after 16 years he found the seminars have an integrity and standing in Indian industry: *Where else do you have major corporations paying to have their people trained in MRA?* Over 2,000 people have taken part in the last three years alone.

TELCO, one of India's largest corporations, sends people to help with each seminar. TELCO Pune wants "as many MRA seminars as you can do" in their factory. Possibilities in the industrial field seem endless. There are requests from Jaipur, Aurangabad and companies in South India as well as other Pune Industries. Some industrialists have offered to fund a 20-minute film to show change at work. Another businessman has offered to find sponsors for such films for national TV.

Training: By every measure, the experiment of hosting *Equipping Oneself For a Lifetime*, the young people's training course, "exceeded all expectations". The setting of Asia Plateau and India has been ideal. Among the 30 participants from 18 countries were 3 Poles and 2 Cambodians. More Australians took part than when the programme was held in Melbourne. Fifteen students stayed on to help run the centre during the consultations and take part in further field trips. It was decided to confirm the earlier proposal to offer this course in alternate years in India and Australia.

Outreach: Several Indians expressed concern that having so many industrial seminars necessarily results in a lessening of outreach to other areas of Indian life, and to the region. General conferences have tapered off. There have been three youth delegations from Bangladesh but only Sushobha Barve has been able to visit there. More time should be given to North-East India, to outreach to Pakistan and to the issue of Hindu/Sikh/Muslim relations.

We also recognized that Asia Plateau has played less of a part in our world-wide outreach than it did some years ago. This trend should be reversed. Asia Plateau must become a home for the whole world. In particular our thoughts turned to the role it could play in restoring relationships in West Asia. We also thought of the Soviet Union. Mr. Zelinsky, a Russian journalist who was in Caux last summer, had commented to Sushobha Barve, *You in India could help us with answers to resolve our ethnic conflicts in the Central Asian Republics.*

Finance: The current accounts of Asia Plateau and MRA India are in balance. For the past three years income has exceeded expenditure; 87% comes from Indian sources, mostly the industrial seminars. However, there is no reserve fund set aside for the major maintenance which will be needed as the buildings get older.

Personnel: Our thoughts for an expanded outreach from Asia Plateau brought into sharp focus the reality that the team carrying responsibility for the centre is very small. In addition, several of these now feel led to give their time elsewhere.

Therefore we decided to make a conscious effort to recruit young people for 1-3 year periods and to enlist some in mid-career with previous MRA experience for shorter periods. Indian colleagues told about a *Reflections* week in December with 40 friends from all over the country. It was a very honest, at times painful, but above all rewarding time. A number of

people in jobs decided to take time off to help with the Panchgani programme regularly. Kiran and Neeru Gandhi plan to base at Panchgani for a year. O.P. Bagaria said, *We are learning wider ways of doing things and that makes me want to take part ...I learnt more about MRA in those few days than ever before. We need such time to let our souls catch up with our bodies. What is needed is a flowering of the spirit. Then we will recapture the spirit of miracles.*

As it is now possible for many foreign nationals to get multiple entry visas for up to six months, we encourage our world team to offer their services generously and thereby help make Asia Plateau truly a home for the whole world.

Egyptian colleagues remarked on the striking "cultural affinities" that they found in India. *I feel very at ease, at home here,* said Dr. Ayman El Mohandes. *It makes me think that the atmosphere and environment would be conducive to dialogue. A lot of the self-consciousness in the way people react to the West relates to environment.*

This observation prompted the suggestion to create opportunities at Asia Plateau for the many students from the Middle East who study in India to get to know Indians. The same could be done for the larger group of non-Arab Muslim students. Pakistan and Bangladesh, for example, are right at hand.

Conclusion: A specific concept emerged for an event early next year which would bring Asia Plateau to the heart of the world's needs. This idea is outlined at the end of the report. Our unanimous conclusion is that Asia Plateau has a more vital role to play not only in our public outreach but also in the development of the experience, expression and aims of MRA itself. Suresh Khatri added, *We want to make Asia Plateau a home for the world and for MRA ideas.*

#### FAITH, 'FAITHS' AND THE FUTURE

Two Egyptian doctors, Ayman El-Mohandes, who lives in the USA, and Mona Marzouk, who works in Britain, shared some of the spiritual treasures of Islam and presented an historical background to current events from their perspective. (See below).

The best way to understand Islam, they said, is through a genuine friendship with a Muslim. Share your individual experience of change that comes from surrender to the will of God. It is these experiences of the reality of faith that can be understood by Muslims. Bear in mind that the Muslim tradition is to confess to God but not to other people. Jesus, Mary and the Holy Spirit have honorable place in the Quran. Following are some *Hadith* sayings of the Prophet Muhammad:

- David said, "Oh, Lord, why did you cause creation to come into being?" God replied, "I was a hidden treasure. I wanted to be known so I created all of creation."
- Happy is the person who finds fault with himself instead of finding fault with others.
- God is forgiving and likes forgiveness.
- The Prophet declared, "We have returned from the lesser jihad (struggle) to the greater jihad." They asked, "Oh, Prophet of God, what is the greater jihad?" He replied, "Struggle against the lower self."

For those wishing to gain more basic knowledge of Islam, Dr. Charis Waddy's new edition of *The Muslim Mind* is essential reading. In an extensive and thoughtprovoking paper, Charis wrote:

One of the distinctive trends of thought in the past fifty years has been a fresh emphasis on the Holy Spirit - a wind of God which can blow away the dogmatism and exclusiveness which often restricts us Christians... In the general pattern of friendship and partnership between individuals there is a mutual challenge to live in practice by the highest we know. There are great examples of cross-fertilization in recent years. The French scholar Massignon found the Catholic faith he had rejected through the study of Muslim mysticism. The scholar Andre Chouraqui found again his Jewish faith through Christian nurses and Muslim mystics. Muhammad Asad, an Austrian Jew, came to Saudi Arabia as a reporter in the 1930s and became one of the best interpreters of Islam in this century.

Charis' paper is available on request from one of the participants or from Charis.

### Background To Events In The Arab World

The main Arab civilizations have been based around the cities of Baghdad, Damascus and Cairo. For centuries they claimed leadership in the Arab world. In recent years as a result of oil, economic power has passed to the desert kingdoms. In the aftermath of the Ottoman Empire, borders were created by the Western powers. There has been a deep feeling in the Arab world that their fate was not in their own hands. This has resulted in attempts at unity. In fact there is too much individualism to make the idea of a united Arab leadership likely.

The Arab world mistrusts the West for its decadence and the Soviet Union for its atheism. At the same time, the twentieth century has brought changes in Arab Muslim societies and immense problems: The imbalance of wealth due to oil, the tension between technology and faith, population growth, tension between individual freedom and collectivism, and threats to the moral fabric of society. In the absence of alternatives from East and West, there is a turning inward. This is fertile ground for fundamentalism.

MRA's recent registration in Egypt (the first Arab country where this has happened) is very significant and creates the potential for important new outreach. It is vital not to jeopardise this by a hasty desire "to do something in the Middle East". What is needed are *uniquely God-guided initiatives by people who can heal the hurts. Empathy and compassion are vital. This is not the time for exploratory surgery, but for the healing spirit of a Florence Nightingale.*

### Mona Marzouk shared these thoughts:

I woke up this morning grateful for the watershed (in our discussions) yesterday. For many months I had not been able to put my finger on what was troubling me and I had not stopped long enough to reach the root of it. I was feeling:

1. Hurt - about being Arab and Muslim at this time and at the world's negative reaction or indifference.
2. Anger - not just at the West's reaction but also at the folly of various Arab actions that have contributed to the West's increasing bewilderment and reaction.
3. Turmoil - feeling both pride in my culture and background but and shame at the suffering Arabs have inflicted on one another and others in the name of nationalism or religion.
4. Inadequacy in the face of my personal responsibility and all the political complexities. I had long ago taken to heart to be a bridge between East and West, Islam and other faiths, but I had not given enough thought to the question of Islam's historic role or unique role at this point in time. I needed to be responsible for thinking out this question and not abdicating the responsibility simply because I am not a scholar of Islam and can't speak on behalf of Islam.

5. Overwhelmed by people's interest and their longing to understand the issues and my faith, and also angry that as a world fellowship it has taken this long to do so.

What am I being asked to do at this moment?

1. At a personal level, to live each moment in the light of God's leading.
2. Not to let barriers or shadows grow between me and anyone else, despite selfrighteous feelings of hurt, anger or misunderstanding.
3. To do only what I feel I am lead to do. The rest is in God's hands.
4. Pray for those who are battling for n- -w wisdom and who are lone voices in the Middle East and West.
5. To be wholeheartedly in one place but in my heart and prayers to take on other places.
6. To identify and be responsible for the past as well as the future. I feel deeply sorry for those who have been hurt and have suffered at the hands of Arabs or Muslims for whatever reason. Thinking particularly of the suffering of Hindu and Western friends here who have been hurt by their contacts with Muslims, I apologise to those here who have been hurt by such contacts.

The Middle East does not need more experts with a profound and detailed knowledge of facts, rights and wrongs. It needs people who can open their hearts to pain and suffering and not draw back from it.

#### Hindu Muslim Relations in India

Rajmohan, Sushobha and other Indian colleagues emphasised the seriousness of the current divisions which they described as the deepest since 1947. Violence has spread beyond the cities to the villages. In spite of these difficulties many sincere Hindus want to show that all faiths have a secure home here. Genuine apologies for hurts caused would evoke a remarkable response.

One Hindu commented, *Muslims and Hindus are trying to be a political force while they should be a moral and spiritual force. The nation calls out for more Hindus who will give their lives to serve.. All in India agree that we can all meet to seek the will of the One God.*

#### Sushobha Barve added:

The history of most religions has two faces - the aggressive face and the compassionate face. Those who feel aggrieved or threatened by the other, often want to remember only the negative side of history. Consciously or unconsciously they ignore the positive contribution made by the other group to the flowering of civilization, of which both groups are the beneficiaries.

We may never reach an understanding in a theological or political discussion. However, experience has shown me that understanding and reconciliation with the Muslims or any other group is possible when approached at the human level. Whenever I have accepted and admitted wrongs committed by the Hindus unconditionally and expressed appreciation for the positive contribution made by the other group towards the welfare of our country, there has been a positive response.

A friend from Northeast India spoke of the vast numbers of illegal immigrants pouring into his region from Bangladesh. *It is a new reality we have not yet grasped. There is a sense of panic and despair. We will face very deep conflict between tribals, Hindus and Muslims.* He said that this Consultation had made him for the first time feel able to make a positive approach to Muslims.

### Some Personal Reflections Shared by Participants

- It is not just a question of understanding but becoming equal partners. For someone who is a minority, at a certain point one has to decide to be responsible.
- Faith rather than dogma is the place to start. MRA is the implementation of faith in daily life without which faith remains in the mosque, church or temple.
- Bridgebuilding can only take place when individuals profoundly face distrust, fear, suspicion in our hearts. Friendship is the key. Real friendship should lead to a deeper understanding.
- I have friends among Muslims and Hindus who are more Christ-like than I am. How can I feel superior then to the faith by which they live? We are all on a common road searching for God's love and God's plan.
- In Scriptures we read that the fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness and self control. If you find someone of another faith with these qualities, might you not assume that the person has the Spirit?
- In my situation, there is no room for me to demand that I have a part in bringing solutions. The only helpful part I can play is to surrender my claim to my race, my religion, my culture, so that God can come in and His truth start to grow.
- (A participant from the USA) It would be a mistake to leave having merely reassured ourselves that we all more or less believe the same thing. There are profound differences in the very essence of what we believe and we would be foolish to ignore this or gloss over it. The more important aspect is: what do our different faiths have to contribute to the world and, perhaps specifically at this time, is there something Islam has to say that can take the whole world forward?
- We are ready to sacrifice the lives of thousands of young men in the Gulf. Yet we cannot bring ourselves to consider restraint at home. It is inconceivable to me that we can ask so much of our young men in the Gulf and so little of America for which they are prepared to give their lives. We demand a cost-free, consequence-free life. Is there something that Islam has to offer at this stage in world history? It is not just a question of how to rebuild relationships in the Middle East but of what is the historic role of Islam. We in the West need to stop regarding Islam as a problem and realise that the future cannot be built without it.
- \* MRA will always be misunderstood to some extent because we are breaking fresh ground. MRA teaches us to go through ostracism by people of our own faith as we pursue its universal quality. Some of us who are Christians have not been ready enough to go through this antagonism, and we have sometimes given a theological gloss to what we say or write to make things easier for ourselves, without realising the difficulty we create for those of other faiths.
- \* Many fundamentalist Muslims and Christians outside of MRA do live their faith fully in the moral sense. The weakness of the fundamentalists is not that they don't bring individuals to commitment to God but that they cannot relate to devout people of other faiths.

A unique contribution of MRA is to provide an honest forum where the strengths of the different faiths can be channelled to bring true global change and true tolerance.

### PUBLIC EXPRESSION OF MRA

We recognise that we have still only scratched the surface of this vast and vital subject. Non-Christian friends emphasised their respect for the Christian origin of MRA but pleaded with us to think of their non-Christian countries in our public expression, especially the printed word. Otherwise, some may infer that there is a hidden desire to convert.

1. There is a danger that as MRA becomes rooted in various local situations, those involved may pick up more local beliefs and attitudes. It will take more than Caux once a year to keep us global in our aim. Is one reason why we sometimes have difficulty in articulating our message for the world that we have retreated from global aims? The value of the consultation is the process of thinking for the world.
2. While we must continue to make publications and presentations acceptable to people of all faiths, we recognise a need to produce books, publications and videos for specific situations. To this end, more advantage could be taken in Caux of the opportunity to record interviews with personalities.
3. Australian friends wrote: *A lot of our language is non verbal; much of the time people pick up the spirit of an encounter more than the words. The care of the person and the way we live is often decisive.*
4. A European said, *I would like to appeal to our non-Christian friends to understand that in the West we need to deal with decadence and lack of faith. We have to think in terms of reaching a whole section of humanity who have become estranged from their spiritual heritage.*
5. Other thoughts shared included:

The cost of my obedience decides the effectiveness of my language or expression of what MRA means to me.

The most dangerous thing would be to try to control the freedom of expression of an individual.

MRA must retain the conviction that personal change is the one key to global change. My life is my message. Without God's spirit, MRA is a lantern without a flame.

Much of our discussion focussed on the expression of MRA as it relates to our various faiths, but there are many other aspects which we must address in the future. We encourage readers of this report to review the relevant portions of the report from the Mount Fuji Consultation in 1989.

### CAUX

Following the recommendation of the last Consultation, the idea of an enlarged community has been pursued. Nine people have announced their coming for a period of 1-5 months, from mid-April onwards, and some others come for shorter periods. Others, particularly French-speaking, would be welcome.

Two lets are taking place before the summer: a long weekend to a Franco-Swiss church group (200p +) and in June the participants to the TV Symposium in Montreux hire rooms on a bed-breakfast basis in Mountain House. A number of people have offered their help for that. We



are also exploring the idea of replacing some of the temporary hired staff with students from East European countries who would thus pay for their journey to and stay in Caux during part of the conference. A Roumanian has already announced herself for that.

Brochures and application forms for the Caux Scholars Program - an internship in applied international studies – are now available from the Washington office. Several people offered to help with student recruitment in their countries. The program begins on July 1.

#### INTERNATIONAL GATHERING IN ASIA PLATEAU, JANUARY, 1992

Towards the end of the week, we came back to the belief that Asia Plateau could do much to heal the wounds of the Gulf war and the conflicts within India and the subcontinent. We therefore decided that from January 4 - 14, 1992, there should be a *Time for reflection, healing and reconciliation* (working title only).

A group will work on the invitation. We emphasise that, while Asia Plateau can cater for 120 guests in addition to its permanent residents, the primary aim should be to invite those from all our countries who will want to take part in the healing process. Indian friends hope that some will offer to come and support them in the preparations for this important world event.

#### FUTURE CONSULTATIONS

All of us felt that we had benefitted very greatly from the week which confirmed in our minds the value of the Consultation process. Consideration was given to future agenda items. There was a particularly enthusiastic response to the suggestion of addressing the subject of *enlistment of fulltime workers* at the next meeting held in Berlin at the end of August. We also thought we should discuss soon the issue of nationalism. It was left to the newly created coordination group to finalise agenda and work out details for the next meeting.