

2000 Global Consultation of Moral Re-Armament (MRA)

A fresh look at the world and MRA's priorities from a non-Western perspective Asia Plateau, Panchgani, India

The Panchgani Consultation agreed:

- ◆ On the globalization of MRA based on a shared commitment, transparency, and inclusiveness
- ◆ On a sense of priority in tackling the root causes of poverty and corruption
- ◆ On holding a global conference of those committed to carrying the work of MRA into the next decade and beyond

As the 2000 Global Consultation of Moral Re-Armament (MRA) at Asia Plateau began, participants came to know of two words that would help them successfully navigate Indian culture: *namaste* and *achha*. *Namaste* is a common Indian expression, used as a greeting and connoting a degree of sacredness in the meeting. *Achha* carries at least two meanings: "I understand" and "is that so?". As participants at the 2000 Consultation discovered, a sacred richness pervaded the gathering (*namaste*) inspired by a deepening of understanding (*achha*) of our various cultures, heritages, legacies, pain, and needs.

It is with the deepest gratitude that we express our thanks to the MRA-India team for hosting the 2000 Global Consultation. Their hard work and preparations created an ideal environment for the deep spiritual and practical work accomplished at the gathering.

A diverse group of 38 participants from 27 countries, including seven members of the International Council (IC), shared from their own individual and country experiences (*see participant list at end of document*). This process – as well as morning and evening prayers and meditations together, and periods of quiet throughout the program – quickly united us as a community at a level that was extraordinarily deep. The group was further knitted together by prayer for Dr Simi Johnson from Nigeria, who experienced a mild heart attack and contracted pneumonia while en route to Panchgani, and for Lotty Wolvekamp from the Netherlands whose father's deteriorating health required her to return home midway through the consultation. Translations were provided in three languages in a spirit of care for each other.

The theme of the Consultation was "A Fresh Look at the World and MRA's Priorities from a non-Western Perspective". From the tableland of Asia Plateau, participants were afforded a physical glimpse of the non-Western world. And for those from the West, the Asians, Africans, and Latin Americans provided unique spiritual, emotional and intellectual insights which shaped the discussions at the consultation.

As we enter the 21st century, the global community of MRA faces a number of questions: What is the root of MRA and what is the fruit? What are the greatest needs within MRA? What are the priorities of MRA? Addressing these issues on a global basis, rather than simply as an informal collection of local entities, was at the heart of the meetings in Panchgani.

Regional Perspectives

From the second through the fifth days of the Consultation, each participant was given the opportunity to provide a glimpse into the workings of MRA in his/her own country, feelings about the direction of the work, and the heartfelt needs of the fellowship in that country/region. These presentations were given by regional groups.

ASIA

"Creating a new type of community in the urban jungle of modern society"

Addressing the theme and sharing his perspective, K Haridas from Malaysia outlined several themes which cry for attention and work: economics, power and governance, technology, family breakdown, drugs, environmental degradation and modernization. Transitions in Asia have taken place within a very short time frame. This has overloaded existing structures and systems. Such weaknesses have undercut change and expectations.

Issues relating to ethnicity, religion, poverty and corruption represent a reality. Solutions call for addressing weaknesses in human nature. Thus change in the individual becomes a catalyst in responding to the needs in society.

Outlining his own personal spiritual journey, Haridas stressed how yoga, meditation and prayer, as aspects of Hinduism, have added richness and meaning in his life. Notions of the "god within" and "karma" as well as exploring the term "spiritual" were outlined. A spiritual perspective may involve emphasizing:

Substance over form

Essentials over peripherals

Inclusiveness over exclusiveness

Contextual interpretation over literal interpretation

A holistic approach over a particular approach

He concluded by emphasizing that a moral and spiritual perspective on globalization is needed, instead of the present exclusive focus on markets, trade and investments. His points were greatly appreciated by those of other religions.

We heard about Taiwan's Clean Election campaign and family life programs. While expressing gratitude to the West, Japan is now seeking its own identity in the global community in the context of history and of an upcoming review of its post-war Constitution. With the establishment of a new MRA Association, friends in the Philippines are concerned about the ethnic and religious crises affecting the Mindanao region. Kiran Gandhi of India described MRA's regular training program for business and industry which over 25 years has significantly contributed to building human relations and teamwork between labor and management, as well as integrating the diversity of India's religions and castes. Niketu Iralu from Northeast India told of a remarkable Naga "pilgrimage of conscience" to the memorial of Mahatma Gandhi. "At the level of conscience, we are all equal," he said.

AFRICA

*"God has given us what we can carry.
This is why the elephant, and not the mouse, was given tusks."*

From Africa, we heard calls for justice and for African-led renewal. The legacy of colonialism continues to plague Africa in the form of exploitation, conflict, poverty, poor health conditions, loss of cultural values, bad governance, humiliation, and the undermining of self-confidence. Armed conflicts continue to rage on the continent in the Democratic Republic of Congo and elsewhere. Corruption and greed have grown at the cost of traditional generosity and hospitality. The tremendous debt burden continues to hinder growth in important areas like health and education. HIV/AIDS is devastating entire populations throughout the continent. Ethnic diversity (42 different ethnic groups in Kenya alone) has been exploited for political gain.

In the midst of the anguished cries, there were signs of hope. "We are the sons and daughters of history. We are not guilty of the sins of the past, but we are responsible for their healing," stated one African. In this light, significant Pan-African and international conferences are being organized (Ugandan conference entitled "Transforming Africa from a Bleeding to a Renewed Continent" in May and Cameroon family conference in June). People from across Africa are taking responsibility for bringing about change within the continent (a street-theater group is forming in Kenya in partnership with neighboring countries). On the international level, debt forgiveness, through to Jubilee 2000, has begun to take shape (\$100 billion is now available for debt cancellation, though organisers say a further \$240 billion is needed by the end of 2000).

MRA's presence in Africa, strong in the 1960s, weakened significantly in the subsequent years. The messages of hope and reconciliation found in the film "Freedom" and the powerful work done in Zimbabwe around independence have not been matched in recent times. Priorities have been mixed and direction has been less focused. Moral and spiritual poverty have joined material poverty in the region.

Buli Khanyile from South Africa urged Africans to take responsibility for Africa and for Africans to stop looking at MRA as a foreign concept but one which can be owned by Africa. A discreet yet forceful global strategy of making MRA more public in Africa was called for. The "Clean Kenya Campaign" has raised MRA's profile in Kenya and Joseph Karanja reported the hope to expand this into a "Clean Africa Campaign." He noted that the film "Freedom" was being shown on Kenya television while we met in Panchgani. "We don't want a timid MRA; we want a bold MRA to bring a powerful message," was the call from Lucienne Munono from the Democratic Republic of Congo, a country embroiled in an armed conflict which shows no signs of abating. She told us how she had turned aside the temptation of accepting high government office in the corrupt regime of Mobutu, despite the heavy pressure of family members who were eager for the rewards it would bring.

Northern Africa, represented by Hatem Akkari from Tunisia, brought some of the unique needs of this region to the table: unity between the Arabs themselves (at all levels), relations between the Christian West and the Muslim Arab world, and the relationships between the Arab world and Israel. The recent Malta Conference was a step toward addressing some of these needs.

AMERICAS

"We need to hold each other in unconditional high regard."

"Bit by bit, MRA made the seeds of hate dry up," said Dr. Heyde Duran from Colombia about her own spiritual journey. Her country is in a dire situation. High unemployment, large numbers of businesses and individuals facing bankruptcy, armed conflict and drug production/ traffic have weakened the moral fabric of Colombia. In all of Latin American society, socio-economic imbalances, more than ethnic differences, are at the core of the unrest in the region. The wounds left by armed conflict in Central America have yet to be healed.

A new spirit of brotherhood appears to be emerging in the region that provides an opening for dialogue between North and South. This work has begun also between teams in Latin America and the US. The work of "Gente que Avanza," whose origins were in MRA, was mentioned as one of the shining lights bringing hope to this area. As Luis Puig of Guatemala stated: "There is a desire for cooperation without loss of identity."

Technological and economic growth in North America has been accompanied by an increased sense of spiritual poverty, despair, disillusionment and dehumanization. The tremendous diversity

of racial and ethnic groups has been a breeding ground for mistrust and hostility. The work of MRA in North America has focussed on building bridges of dialogue across these various groups, particularly between African-Americans and whites (USA), Chinese and whites (Canada), and First Nations people and whites (Canada). Dialogues between French-speaking and English-speaking Canadians were also highlighted.

Some of the brokenness felt in the global MRA community as a result of divisions in the USA during the 1960s and difficulties in the 1990s was referred to. A sense of global responsibility resulted in the USA being outwardly focussed (1970s and 1980s), while a need to be credible within the country led to more focus on national needs in the 1990s. Today, MRA in the USA is focussing on team-building and on tying together streams that have come out of MRA in the past.

EUROPE/AUSTRALASIA

"Personal change means nothing if I pass by people in need."

"We don't have to live in the past, we can redeem it," was the message brought by Mike Brown of Australia, referring specifically to the work of healing in Australia with the Aborigines. MRA's focus on healing history was described with reference to New Zealand and Papua New Guinea, as well as in Europe. At the same time, our painful shared history was acknowledged. Others spoke of the needs in their own countries – both generally and in the work of MRA – and efforts to work in solidarity with people in non-Western countries on global needs. Mike Smith from the UK highlighted the work of Bill Peters and Martin Dent on debt relief (Jubilee 2000 campaign) and of Peter Eigen of Transparency International on corruption. These and other stories strengthened our conviction that the world's great injustices can be combatted by firm and God-led individuals. Stories of personal change were shared as was the positive legacy left by the previous generation of MRA workers from this region throughout the world.

Tremendous opportunities are also presenting themselves to the MRA community in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Annette Wiethuechter from Germany mentioned that while political unification had taken place between East and West Germany, human unification (relationships) had not followed. Developing relationships and building leadership, as well as identifying the most appropriate ways to provide financial assistance, will need to be addressed in the coming years. While regretting that it did not work out for participants from Eastern Europe to attend the Consultation, we hoped this region will be regularly represented in the future. The challenges facing the European/Australasian teams operate at two levels: identifying ways to build teams locally and in building teams in other regions.

Frédéric Chavanne from France, in a powerful statement to the Consultation, made us conscious of the fragility of MRA in some European countries. He responded frankly to criticisms made of the West and the implications for MRA's network. He pleaded with non-Western nations to come not only with accusations or requests but to articulate a vision for the West.

Global Issues/Global Responses

As the 38 of us, representing a very diverse group of countries, spoke from our hearts, we were struck by the ability of the participants in the group to share very deeply, very quickly. We found that there were many common issues expressed from team members from around the globe and that there were a number of specific needs of particular countries.

We divided the issues into "internal MRA" (those issues that deal with MRA teams) and "external MRA" (the needs of the world and MRA's worldwide goals).

Internal MRA

Following a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of our current work, the following issues were identified as needs at both the national and international level. Where discussion on the issue took place, that is indicated:

- ◆ **Communications:** Discussion took place on the importance of the *World Bulletin* within the global MRA community. It was identified as the central means of communication on global issues. Barriers to its distribution (electronic and hard copy) and readership (particularly the need for language translation) were discussed. The IC Secretariat will be contacting local distributors and teams as part of a thorough review of its distribution. Ideas for its editorial style will be pursued. Our "weakness" of sometimes selectively passing on information, and the need of more inclusiveness, we agreed, needs further examination.
- ◆ **Finance:** An important discussion was initiated on financial means and responsibility. A brief history of financing efforts in Africa and Asia was presented with an honest dialogue about questions of dependency and control. Further discussion, particularly on financial accountability, transparency, and skills training is needed. Discussion about an international "solidarity" fund led us to look at the range of present arrangements. Christiane Garin with a working group will begin to map out possible ideas and problems.
- ◆ **Training and skills development:** Training is needed in core areas such as budgeting, technology or international affairs. In addition, growth is needed in relational areas such as trust, gratitude, understanding and expressing needs, and taking and entrusting responsibility.
- ◆ **Commitment to the work of MRA:** A discussion began on the meaning today of full-time work and how those committed to MRA but in full- or part-time jobs could most effectively be engaged in the work of MRA. *See discussion on IC paper below.*
- ◆ **Team building:** Pleas were made by several in the Consultation for help to build teams within their countries, and also the need for an ongoing exchange of team members in other countries in support of our global work. Teams in Central and Latin America, Scandinavia, Africa, the Philippines and Britain are all looking for "exchange programs" of people working for some months in another country. Globalisation surely means a readiness to go to each other's countries. Several participants indicated their willingness to be more available. ACTION 2000 (starting September 2000) provides an imminent opportunity for such exchange;
- ◆ **Enlistment** of new team members, particularly those of the younger generation.

External MRA

There were repeated calls throughout the Consultation that MRA should focus more efforts on two critical areas:

- ◆ **Poverty:** The Consultation re-affirmed MRA's commitment to changing economic and social conditions through a change in the hearts of people. In this light, the Consultation proposed amending the fourth of the "worldwide goals" in the "MRA – Initiative for Change" statement (from the Cyprus Consultation) to read:

Strengthening the motivation of care and moral commitment in economic life and thinking, in order to create jobs, correct economic and environmental imbalance, and tackle the root causes of poverty.

(See full revised statement on last page)

- ◆ **Corruption:** In addition to the Clean Election Campaigns in Kenya and Taiwan, specific grassroots initiatives were suggested such as a special publication, contacts with academics, and building on the work of the Caux Round Table's *Principles for Business*.

Consultation Discussions and Decisions

Several important organizational issues were discussed.

It was decided that all the members of the IC would be active discussants at the Consultation and would sit at the conference table. The IC's contribution to the Consultation was not only significant, but greatly appreciated.

The IC presented four papers to the group which were discussed in some depth and will be taken up in more detail by the IC. These were:

1. **Central characteristics of MRA:** This paper was discussed and, in the end, it was decided that the content would be incorporated into the IC report
2. **The MRA name:** The IC is taking responsibility to solicit from the global community specific suggestions on the name of MRA.
3. **A Global "Hoho"** (a tribal term from North-East India for "people's gathering"): The Consultation agreed that the time was right to hold a global gathering. Broad discussion took place on the idea, purpose, timing and the participation for such a gathering. It was felt that this world assembly would draw together those who feel particularly called to take responsibility for the work of MRA into the next decade, particularly those in their 20's through 50's. The timing suggested is from 4 December, 2001 through 4 January, 2002, with the peak time being the final two weeks of the gathering.
4. **Toward a better understanding of Full Time Work:** A paper containing a re-thought framework for full-time work was discussed. Ashwin Patel from Kenya, by way of a separate paper, has initiated a conversation on what it means to be committed to MRA while in the workplace. The IC will work further on the paper on the basis of input from the Consultation.

The IC will publish their report in the April *World Bulletin*.

The Consultation reached consensus on amending the appendix to the Jamaica document which defines the processes for preparing Global Consultations and for selecting the International Council. The text of these documents can be obtained from the IC Secretariat.

The Consultation confirmed with appreciation Anne Hartnell and Claire Leggat as initial members of the Preparation Committee for the next Consultation. Others will join this team.

Moving Forward

"MRA can make a serious contribution to the human family in the coming years," said Suresh Khatri of Fiji, one of the members of the IC. At the same time, we have recognized that, as a global community, spiritual weakness and "fuzziness" have rendered us less able to respond to expectations around the globe than ever before. A spiritual deepening, at the individual, local, and global level, took place between all of us at Panchgani and must be continued globally to enable us

to carry the torch of MRA forward into the next decade. In this context, the provisional theme for the 2001 Global Consultation will be:

New Ways of Living and Expressing Eternal Truths

The final title and location will be announced shortly in the *World Bulletin*.

MRA has a special part to play in remaking the world in a very practical sense. Searching, at all levels, for where we are being specifically called to focus our human and financial resources is vital in building our global community.

After a week of talking, we learned another valuable Indian word – *bus*, or “stop”.

ALL CONSULTATION PARTICIPANTS – Please send brief feedback from your team to IC Secretariat by 30 April.

By 30 June, please send some estimate of how many from your region may attend the Global Hoho.

By 31 January, 2001, please send a one page assessment of how issues raised in this Consultation have been advanced.

Consultation participants

Hatem Akkari, Tunisia; Mike Brown, Australia; Dante Calma, Philippines; Frédéric Chavanne, France; Knud Simon Christensen, Denmark; Heyde Duran, Colombia; Kiran Gandhi, India; Christiane Garin, Switzerland; Steven Greisdorf, USA; K. Haridas, Malaysia; Anne Hartnell, Canada; Niketu Iralu, India; Yeon-Yuk Jeong, Korea; Joseph Karanja, Kenya; Nombulelo (Buli) Khanyile, South Africa; Terttu Laaksonen, Finland; Claire Leggat, New Zealand/UK; Brian Lightowler, Australia; Viral Mazumdar, India; Lucienne Munono, Democratic Republic of Congo; Keisuke Nakayama, Japan; Ireneo Namboka, Uganda; Pierre Oko Mengue, Cameroon; Dick Pearce, New Zealand/UK; Luis Puig, Brazil; Randy Ruffin, USA; Mike Smith, UK; Vijayalakshmi Subrahmanyam, India; Ellen Tembo, Zimbabwe; Annette Wiethuechter, Germany; Lotty Wolvekamp, Netherlands

International Council participation

Ailsa Hamilton, UK; James Hore-Ruthven, UK; Pieter Horn, South Africa; Suresh Khatri, Fiji; Ren-Jou Liu, Taiwan; Anne-Marie Tate, France; Peter Thwaites, Australia

MRA

INITIATIVE *for* CHANGE

MRA is a way of life. Its goal is global transformation carried forward by people of different convictions and faiths who seek God's inspiration for individual and common action. As agents of change, they work for new motives and relationships at all levels of society, beginning in their own lives.

Current worldwide goals include:

- ◆ **Healing the wounds of history** that sustain cycles of revenge, especially where cultures and civilisations meet.
- ◆ **Strengthening the moral and spiritual dimensions of democracy**, so challenging selfish interests and corruption.
- ◆ **Helping individuals and families** to counter the climate of blame and selfishness with a culture of care and personal responsibility.
- ◆ **Strengthening the motivation of care and moral commitment** in economic life and thinking, in order to create jobs, correct economic and environmental imbalance, and tackle the root causes of poverty.
- ◆ **Rebuilding a sense of community and hope in cities**, and tackling the causes of racial and communal discrimination.
- ◆ **Forging networks among people from different cultures and faiths** based on a shared commitment to work for reconciliation, justice and peace.

How it works

INFORMAL alliances of people who trust each other form around major issues and take action. When individuals care enough for the needs of their community and the world, and apply faith and common core values, answers to intractable problems begin to emerge.

Every individual is encouraged to accept absolute moral standards – in particular love, honesty, purity and selflessness – as guides to personal liberation and the moral and spiritual renewal of society.

This work is open to everyone who wants to engage in it. Listening and responding to "the inner voice" – God's spirit illuminating the human mind – and to conscience are fundamental. People of faith are encouraged to deepen their roots in their own religious tradition.

Formal organisation is kept to a minimum. Coordination is achieved through extensive consultations at national and international levels. Leadership is open to people of all backgrounds. Actions are often undertaken in association with people and groups who have related concerns.