

## **Report from IC Global Consultation, Beirut,**

**March 30-April 5, 2004**

The purpose of the Consultation was to reflect on two themes: the 'basic intuition' of IC and its relevance for a needy world, and the role IC can play in encouraging creative partnerships in situations where people are deeply divided. 27 people from 18 countries met to address these issues at a retreat centre outside Beirut.

The context for our discussions was the rising level of distrust and violence in the world, and the recent war in Iraq. The vast questions of how to build relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims, and how to 'reach the heart' of the USA, have been concerns of IC for many years and particularly since the last Consultation in Britain 18 months ago. The Muslims and Americans present, as well as others with knowledge of the issues, led us in our reflections on these themes.

Others came with different concerns. Africans were grappling with how to heal wounds, promote reconciliation and tackle corruption. We were able to live into the communal tensions in India and neighbouring countries, and hear of encouraging developments. For others the spiritual crisis in the West and the breakdown of family life were the most pressing issues. More generally, the nature of IC itself and how it can retain a sufficiently broad but also deep enough message was central in our discussions. In addition we were provided with the advance thoughts and input from many other people from different parts of the world which stimulated and sharpened our thinking.

One distinctive feature was the search for the articulation of a purpose for IC that would be adequate for the current global situation. We reached out for a sense of vision, commissioning, compulsion. We were reminded that, in an increasingly globalised world, the disparities between rich and poor are enormous. What can we do to go to the heart of the despair in people and address the poverty, illiteracy and injustice which often provide the seed-bed for extremism? In a world where civilisations confront each other and age-old values are being discarded, what can we do to remind people that God has purposes for mankind and a unique way of suggesting solutions to problems?

We believe IC has an important role to play in the world. There are tasks for which IC has been uniquely prepared, and we must pray that God will send people to carry them out. Bringing answers is not just a matter of sentiment or high ideals; doing what is right is essential for humanity's very survival. The forces of unbelief and materialism are strong, as are the barriers created by entrenched views. IC must bring together people of conscience to foster trust and responsibility on the basis of moral and spiritual values, and encourage the kind of deep and living experience from which lasting change may emerge. It is a dangerous moment for mankind, but also one full of opportunity for ordinary people to make a difference.

## **Lebanon's message for the world is that you can overcome your hate.**

From the conception of the Consultation, the Lebanese hosts had given detailed thought to our visit. They also had messages about their country and their work to convey to us:

*"I hope that fellowship will result, if we can make a team of all the participants"* (Assaad Chaftari) One way was through their generous, practical care: the choice of the retreat centre, with its space and situation overlooking the Mediterranean; meals with families, and a day's outing to the North to see the Cedars and the ancient Maronite hermit caves - a journey which was exhilarating in its breathtaking scenery, and in precipitous mountain roads negotiated with skill by the coach driver.

*"This Consultation is an opportunity for us all to renew our commitment"* (Joe Hakim) Father Martin McDermott, an American Jesuit priest who is part of the Lebanese team, spoke to us on three mornings on the themes of commitment, faithfulness and prayer. He noted that when a person listens to his conscience, his conscience grows, but when he disobeys it, it begins to flatter him and self-deception sets in. These reflections were followed, in the tradition of the Lebanese weekly team-meetings, by 20 minutes of quiet together, followed by sharing.

*"I promise to you as a Lebanese group to do all to let you know about our region in its bad aspects and its good aspects"* (Mohammed Mortada) On the first afternoon we were privileged to hear from Mrs Rabab El-Sadr, head of the El-Sadr Foundation for health and social education, whose family have been among the leaders of the Shi'ite community for hundreds of years.

She said, "During the Lebanese war we women worked for peace although everyone around us was going mad. Taking care of the many orphans, sick people, and preparing food. We used to work 24 hours a day, and to sleep sitting up. Many people came to me for help to get back their sons. The team who worked together during the difficult times had the quality of love of working for all - Shia, Sunni, Christians, whoever. We continue working today. Lebanon's message for the world is that you can overcome your hate."

A group of us were received by Sayed Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah, a renowned Shi'ite spiritual leader. He described human beings as divine in origin, but becoming like muddy rivers; IC's work was to help people take the rocks and the dirt out of their rivers. Greek Orthodox Bishop George Khodr also spoke to us stressing the long periods when Christians, Muslims and Jews have lived together to each other's mutual benefit.

Another group went to Bourj El-Barajneh Palestinian refugee camp in south Beirut to meet Oussama Ayoub and leaders of his community. Oussama was born to refugee parents in the camp which is a crowded mass of tenement buildings connected by a labyrinth of narrow passages and open drains. Palestinian refugees have no passports, restricted opportunities to work, and cannot leave the country with any certainty that they will be allowed back. Dick Ruffin, responding to our hosts' welcome, regretted his country's lack of even-handed policies towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and acknowledged his shame as a Christian for the mistreatment of the Jews by European Christians over hundreds of years.

Our visit there presented us with a reality for which we knew there was no easy human solution. But, as Joe Hakim - a Lebanese Christian visiting a Palestinian refugee camp for the first time – said, even if you can't see a whole answer, there is *always* a next step. Joe's own next step was shown to him that afternoon when he received several invitations to return there.

*“The ‘basic intuition’ means IC’s specific charisma, which ought to bind us; by rediscovering and reclaiming this, we will have the clarity for the other things.”* (Ramez Salamé) On the third evening, a group of 20 or more from the wider Lebanese MRA/IC team - some driving quite long journeys – came up to meet us. Among them were people from four of the formerly-warring Lebanese communities - Shi'ite, Christian, Druze and Sunni.

From the start it was evident to us all that they have an infectious, deep friendship and teamwork with each other. Ramez recounted how the Lebanese team had developed, as one person was led to another. And some of these people contributed to the picture by telling us ‘in two minutes’ what MRA/IC meant in their lives. For the past 15 years they have met in Beirut every Thursday evening. Their commitment, faithfulness and friendship challenged us all. We could not have had a better demonstration of how the living of the ‘basic intuition’ of MRA/IC leads to trust, and makes creative partnership possible and enjoyable!

### **Some quotations from participants in our meetings**

- Creative energy in our soul originates in God. I have a part in God's plan. I wrote asking the fellow I'd offended to show me the faults in myself I could not see. **Niketü Iralu**
- Our Lebanese friends lived through a severe crisis and discovered that the only sure hope is to be faithful to the deepest thing revealed to you. **Dick Ruffin**
- IC is about individuals finding their highest calling in life and discovering that it is part of a wider pattern. **Peter Riddell**
- Be ready for interruptions and obstacles and be more committed to the One who gives the projects than to the project itself... Young people in the ex-Soviet countries need the absolute moral standards as our inner compass to find a way out of the ‘desert’. **Sergei Golovin**
- Let go of what we know. We put so much stress on intellect and block the spirit of the Almighty. **Joseph Karanja**
- Tools need to be devised to reach different times and cultures while not changing the basics. **Sue Snyder**
- I have been encouraged here to recognize the extraordinary opportunity for God to act through my fear and confusion. **David Swann**
- We are building a two-class world and at the same time a borderless world. This is a prescription for trouble. **John Graham**
- I wondered if IC is ready to get to the depth of pain people feel. And the answer is ‘yes, we were able to’! **Kathy Al-Kaisi**
- You can't take responsibility unless you give up your right to blame someone for what is wrong. We need to be ready to see where the blame lies with us. **Sushobha Barve**

- It is necessary to revisit the truths that do not change as we search for the way ahead. **Ginny Wigan**
- Here we are mostly Muslims, Christians and Hindus, but I want to register the importance of the Jewish heritage in all we do. **Ahmed Egal**
- There can be no peace without dialogue between religions. Dialogue requires honesty, forgiveness and justice. **Imam Sajid**
- In Europe we are losing continuity all around - family, social care, business. The thought that you can be called to work with and care for someone or something for a lifetime is foreign to most young people. We need a counter-culture of continuity, faithfulness and commitment in relationships and tasks. **Camilla Nelson**
- Some of us Africans feel as if God has turned His back on us. Changing this feeling will only come from changing people's hearts. **Thomas Ntambu**
- In the struggle to meet the threats to our planet's health and beauty we need to combat the destruction of the green cover by deforestation, chemical pollution etc. But the ultimate need is to restore the hidden aquifers beneath the surface. Similarly in the spiritual life, the fight starts and continues at the surface, which enables the health base underneath to be restored. And the restored health underneath sustains the surface where we live out our lives. The two are interdependent. **Niketu Iralu**. (*see paper by Niketu Iralu on 'Basic Intuitions of MRA/IC' on the IC Extranet*)

... and on our last evening, as we thanked the Sisters who run the retreat centre where we met, Sr. Josephine Raad, the Superior of the Convent, said to us "We have enjoyed your visit. We felt you were at home here and that you were like angels among us. We have been praying for you."

## Outcomes

### An overarching vision for change

*The situation of the world today is increasingly intolerable for many and unsustainable for all. The political tools and leadership to heal it are weak or absent, and communications have so shrunk the world that there is no avoiding the consequences.*

*It is a new situation, not simply an extension of the old, and the old tools - diplomacy, power-balancing and military force - are not on their own competent to deal with it.*

*What is needed is a revolutionary application of faith and conscience. This will come as much from ordinary people taking leadership and responsibility as from traditional elites. This is the path to a new culture of caring. This is the source of hope the world needs.*

*Change is possible. Changed, committed people can change the world.*

## Suggestions for action

1. What has developed even since the last Global Consultation in 2002 endorsing '**vigorous dialogues between Muslims and non-Muslims**' gives cause for confidence that IC's unique approach is a solid basis for spiritual growth and building creative partnerships. The central elements of this approach are: attentiveness to the guidance of God, educating ourselves and others to the facts, honestly acknowledging past and present wrongs, genuinely caring for others, and taking actions that develop trust and respect.

We were encouraged to hear of:

- the outreach of the Lebanese team through newspaper articles, school visits and the preparation of a video to educate people in the beliefs and practices of the different confessional communities
- the activities of the Egyptian team to build relations between Muslims and Christians, and to participate in IC conferences
- Imam Sajid's work in both Muslim and Western countries to challenge people to reject prejudice and remain faithful to the highest values of their faith traditions
- the determination of IC friends in the Arab world to deepen relationships with one another, and their desire to take further initiatives in the Muslim and Arab world
- a Dialogue to explore the Abrahamic values as a basis for common action, to take place in Morocco under the High Patronage of King Mohammed VI later this month - this follows the Muslim Dialogue in Caux 2002 initiated by Rajmohan Gandhi, Cornelio Sommaruga and Prince El Hassan bin Talal of Jordan.
- continuing initiatives of Palestinians, Israelis and others towards a just solution of the Middle East conflict which many believe is a prime cause of mistrust between the Muslim world and the West
- numerous instances from Australia to France, India to Ukraine, Somalia to the USA, where individuals are being led to reach across religious, ethnic and factional divides.

Some of these initiatives are the outcome of life-long callings to care for another country; others have just begun. Anyone can make a contribution. Every act of care and every genuine human gesture cuts the ground from under the feet of those committed to violence.

In view of the wide variety of initiatives, the Consultation believes that greater communication and teamwork would heighten the effectiveness of this work. We should envisage a series of dialogues in our centres and elsewhere, similar to those held in recent years in Malta. A proposal for a regional consultation in the Middle East is being considered.

2. Support and expand IC's treatment of **global issues of poverty and injustice**. Specifically, consider the relationship of these issues to distrust and conflict, and include them as integral challenges in building creative partnerships. Develop imaginative ways to reach decision-makers and the public.

3. Assist the **American IC team**'s continuing effort to address racial and religious divisions and to develop leadership in different sectors of American society.

- Increase the number of visits by non-Americans.
- Encourage the idea expressed by American friends of bringing the Lebanese experience to Washington and other cities.

- Non-Americans to maintain close communication with Americans.

Particular appreciation was expressed by many for the paper on ‘Partnerships and the Basic Intuition of IC’ prepared by Rob Corcoran, and available on the IC extranet.

**4.** Do more to bring IC’s message and stories to **young people**, including in schools. Help them discover the wider world. Give them models of acting and working in that world.

- Continue to develop and use IC materials in schools.
- Continue to bring in ‘role-models’, especially from foreign countries, to speak to students.
- Encourage more people to engage in local school policy bodies.

**5.** Expand the **telling of stories** of IC’s experiences in magazines and newspapers, on radio and television and on the Web.

- Develop and implement national media strategies to do this.
- Encourage individuals to develop relationships with their local media and to offer opinion pieces, letters to the editor and news items on IC themes and events.
- Support and train individuals in writing and public speaking.
- Support the expansion of the international IC website, national IC websites and the websites of individual Programmes.

**6.** Support IC peace-making programmes in **Africa**, and the Clean Africa Campaign.

**7.** Ask the International IC Council to **track** these suggestions.

*These challenges are large and difficult. To meet them will require strengthening the basic intuition of IC in all of us, following the leading of the inner voice step by step, and building the fellowship of IC. At the same time we need to engage new people by making the invitation to join - and the opportunities we offer - clearer and more compelling.*

All those who came together in Beirut from abroad want to express our heartfelt gratitude to our Lebanese hosts and friends for a very rich and rewarding week.

Kathy Al-Kaisi (Australia), Sushobha Barve (India), Philip Boobbyer (UK), Assaad Chaftari (Lebanon), Nathalie Chavanne (France), Ahmed Egal (Somalia/Sweden), Peter Everington (UK), Sergei Golovin (Ukraine), John Graham (USA), Mohammed Hassouna (Egypt), Joe Hakim (Lebanon), Mohsen Hussein (Egypt), Niketu Iralu (Nagaland, India), Joseph Karanja (Kenya), Leena Khatri (India/Fiji), Catherine Linton (NZ/USA), Camilla Nelson (Norway), Thomas Ntambu (Congo/Switzerland), Ravindra Rao (India), Peter Riddell (UK), Dick Ruffin (USA), Imam Abduljalil Sajid (Pakistan/UK), Naila Habiby Sherman (Lebanon/USA), Sue Snyder (USA), Christoph Spreng (Switzerland), David Swann (Canada), Ginny Wigan (UK)