

REPORT of the Initiatives of Change/ MRA Global Hoho Asia Plateau, Panchgani, India 30 December 2001 – 20 January 2002

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The People, Place and Process...

Asia Plateau, Panchgani 20 January 2002

Dear friends around the world

It began on New Year's Eve (well, just before), as we proclaimed our personal hopes for the coming year. Little did we know, then, just how our first 20 days of 2002 would be spent – how tiring, how liberating, how full of struggle and joy they would be. Many of us knew each other already, but the number of new faces was at first bewildering, then exciting. And we soon forgot that we'd ever been strangers. The Global Hoho community was born – at its height, over 200 people from 35 nations.

Images jostle for precedence: white prayer ribbons hanging from the fragile branches of our Prayer Tree; filing up to the Plateau in silence to see the sun rise and to cast our symbolic burdens (biodegradable, of course!) off the edge; small groups beneath the trees, listening – fascinated – as individuals shared their life journeys.

A mixture of expectancy and uncertainty hung in the gentle evening air. A blast on the traditional Maharashtrian horn and a Naga chant opened the 'Hoho' (a Naga word meaning assembly of elders to reflect on matters of great importance). We resonated with the conviction that we had been called not just to do better what we had been doing already. What we needed was a willingness to make bold departures from the past and the present. But how to begin the process?

The first step – three days of 'honest conversation' – was the beginning of a discussion that lasted throughout our time together. Many needs emerged; in particular, more effective leadership on clear and relevant issues, and better coordination and teamwork within Initiatives of Change (IC). Other obstacles to our work were not recognised until one participant said that she was afraid to walk on the IC carpet for fear of breaking the eggs hidden beneath it. Some difficult discussions followed, with the views expressed cutting across generations, cultures, experiences... until our carpet became a more comfortable place on which to walk and to sit.

In the second step of the process, we asked, 'What is the Spirit of God attempting to bring to birth in the modern world? And how do we share in helping bring that vision to birth?' Beginning with individual visions and moving out to shared visions, we clustered around several themes: poverty and corruption; leadership and training; the multi-faith issue; and more. Each group worked hard to mould its inspirations into something concrete and realisable, and often felt overwhelmed. However, coming together, we found our visions overlapping and got excited.

The September 11th atrocity, the suffering of Afghanistan and the build-up of tension between India and Pakistan provided an intense backdrop for the Hoho. The perspective shifted when some Muslim friends joined us for a few days: a former Indian Ambassador, a leading academic and activist on women's issues in India and an American research student of Pushtun background who has spent the last few months with an NGO on the Afghanistan border. Dismayed by the media's portrayal of the Muslim world, they highlighted the need for us all to understand one another's faiths. For 'with all our differences we are, first of all, human beings'. Out of this sense of increasing division in the world came a single vision shared by all, of 'Open homes, listening hearts' (*see page 7*).

The unstable state of our world has at last forced poverty – and the increasing gap between the rich and the poor – back on to the international agenda. We resolved that a major focus of IC's work in the next decade should be tackling the root causes of poverty and corruption. Numerous organisations and initiatives are already engaged in this work, but IC has a unique contribution to make: transforming people's hearts and motivations so that the world's wealth is distributed more equally, less greedily.

Apart from keeping us entertained with song and dance, a large contingent from seven African countries worked passionately to outline their vision, of a continent-wide Clean Africa Campaign. As they shared it, we all responded.

We moved on to 'best practice', intending to examine what works well within IC and how to care for each other. With facilitators experienced in the area, we plunged into a practical exercise that highlighted the need for sensitivity in teamwork. However, there was not adequate time to work through what is required to turn visions into reality, and we resolved to continue with more detailed planning after the Hoho.

Individuals took time, mostly in the early mornings, for prayer and reflection – with so many lights on, and figures wandering in the garden, it seemed that everyone was up at the crack of dawn! And each evening we came together in silence, in front of the Prayer Tree – before it was ceremonially planted – or in the peace of the Ma Mi Room. For many, this was the highlight of the day. If only there could have been more time... With so many friends, new and old, from different corners of the globe, we could not resist arranging meetings – about everything from a proposed Pacific conference to the need for a new bicycle for the work in Kenya.

There was little time left to rehearse for the Hoho variety evening, but who needs rehearsals? For over two hours we were captivated by one another's musical, dramatic, comic and other talents. Any ideas where the next show should start?

We felt privileged to have gathered in this most spiritually diverse of regions – close to the reality of poverty and to 'hot spots', yet apparently harmonious. 'India's purpose is to show something to the whole world, to give an example of peace and non-violence and reconciliation to humankind,' said one well-known Indian. 'IC can help India to find its purpose.'

The fellowship we shared – at mealtimes, walking on the plateau or into the village, or over masala tea in the leisurely evenings – was the most precious part of the Hoho. Reality hit one morning, firmly but graciously, when members of the 'Action for Life' team spoke honestly about their difficult experiences of community life. 'God meets us not only in our times of peace and quiet – He is with us in the tangles and the chaos too.' The AfL team, here when we arrived, was a core of warmth and stability throughout the Hoho, and their commitments and fresh perspectives kept us energised.

We exchanged thoughts on the central work of 'life-changing' – the humility required, the recognition that there can be no technique or formula, the willingness to be challenged and transformed ourselves as we travel the journey with others. The discussion could have continued all day.

So, we leave the Hoho carrying with us the 'new and contagious faith and friendship' we'd hoped and prayed for. Unlike the visions – *what we do* – this intangible quality represents *what we are*, and provides a solid and stimulating base on which to begin to build. Sincere thanks to all those who have helped us get here, who have prayed for us and sent their thoughts. We look forward to infecting you with our new and highly contagious Hoho fever.

Nicci Long, for the Global Hoho Team

Sharing deeply...

From our feedback, the sessions that were most appreciated were the 'story-sharing circles' – each day one person telling their life's journey to six or seven others. The Hoho has brought a unique interaction, not normally possible at busy conference programs. Early morning 'reflections' have also enriched our search, with spiritual insights from an Indian dentist, an Australian bureaucrat and a French mother, to name a few. The 'honest conversation' on blocks and frustrations that prevent us from being fully effective brought new decisions and release for many.

It's been a different MRA meeting – but more at the heart of Moral Re-Armament than ever. I feel like we have met in a shared spirit of commitment and loving care. So many different backgrounds and yet such unity.

Anna Christine Christensen, Denmark

In my 35 years' experience of MRA this has been unprecedented... We look back on it as an important sea-change for IC.

David Lancaster, Australia

I am so impressed by the fresh blood taking on this job with maturity and responsibility, especially those from Eastern Europe and Africa. I leave with fresh heart and conviction. Visier Sanyü, Nagaland/Australia

For the first time when I think of MRA I can say 'we'. Not 'me' and 'them'. If you want to be God's instrument, it comes like a breeze. And I have felt that breeze here. Tiha Gudac, Croatia

This was indeed a time of global fellowship. For me the highlight was meeting and making friends with many of the Indian team. Their commitment and deep spirituality has been a source of great inspiration.

Marta Dabrowska, Poland

It's been a new start for me... I have left behind a lot of baggage – some consciously, and some God quietly took away when I wasn't looking.

Betty Lancaster, Australia

I'm coming away from here a completely different person from the way I came here. Owen Lean, UK

Throwing a rock off the edge of the plateau I threw away the pieces of hardness and hurt that have grown in my heart like a rock... I just want to go home and tell my father how much I love him.

Anon

I don't know what it is about this place. The storm has been building up for days... I woke at 1.00 am last night after that familiar dream of the hut where I lived in cold and hunger for eight years. I prayed to God to set me free. I cried for two hours as God revealed each part of my pain... My pillow was wet with my sobbing... I prayed for God to deliver me and give me the grace to forgive... The dampness on my pillow refreshed me... God has brought me on a journey of healing and shown me that it is possible to forgive what happened 40 years ago... I lay awake, smiling in the dark.

Abel Katito, Zimbabwe

The Hoho has given me the chance to look deep into my motivations... and to start to chip away at my pride and my various layers of protection... One thing I know for certain: I would not have made these discoveries without the many faces around me... walking the same direction of discovery and challenge, treading beside me with care and love on a path paved with God's grace.

Cathie-Jean Weeks, Australia

The last few years a hard shell has been building up around me. The Hoho has started to crack that shell.

Geoffrey Craig, UK

God is working away in my heart to prepare me for something unexpected. Maria Grace, UK

Taking risks means treading one step further than you dare to go. Marina Scheijgrond, The Netherlands

The art of life-changing is something very unique to MRA. It was the thing that most attracted me...being instruments of change in other's lives and being changed ourselves by others in the process.

Ritu Angirish, India, with Action for Life.

One of the things I've argued with people is the idea of changing the world. 'Why not think of something practical which you can do?' I say. I am thankful for those moments when I've felt your concern about the issues we face. I humbly want to trust God and to play my part on the tasks we are given...That, of course, is changing the world...'

Neichu Angami, Nagaland /India

Everyone is important and even the smallest tasks matter... If you really want to do big things, go to the zoo and wash elephants!

Ildze Slanke, Latvia, with Action for Life

Searching creatively...

'A shared vision is not an idea. It is not even an important idea.... It is, rather, a force in people's hearts... It may be inspired by an idea, but once it goes further -- if it is compelling enough to acquire the support of more than one person -- then it is no longer an abstraction... People begin to see it as if it exists. Few forces in human affairs are as powerful as a shared vision.'

Peter Senge in 'The Fifth Discipline', quoted by Dick Ruffin

Coming from different countries, faiths, professions and backgrounds, we were asked to articulate our individual visions for IC and from these, to develop shared visions which might focus IC's work in the years to come. Naturally, many of these visions build on already existing initiatives of IC /MRA, and the goals outlined at the Consultations in Cyprus and India:

- Reconciling peoples through healing the wounds of history
- Strengthening the moral and spiritual foundations of democracy
- Encouraging principled leadership in business and professional life
- Creating a culture of care by countering the climate of blame and selfishness
- Tackling the root causes of poverty and corruption
- Building a sense of community and hope in cities across the world
- Forging networks among people from different cultures and faiths

As we shared our concerns and visions, groups formed around particular themes, coming up with a wide range of exciting ideas. Not surprisingly, many are still seeds that have yet to germinate into specific initiatives. Others will need to be considered by national teams. Some – such as leadership development – concentrated on tools that can be applied across the spectrum of IC initiatives. Sifting through the ideas and possibilities, our energy and commitment focussed around the following visions:

1. African action

Vision: To develop a continent-wide **Clean Africa Campaign**, 'a call to build the moral heart of our land,' expanding on the experience of the Clean Kenya Campaign and tackling such vital concerns as poverty, corruption and HIV/AIDS.

- Launching the Campaign at an All-Africa Conference to be held in Nairobi, Kenya, from 30 May 2 June 2002.
- Developing a 'travelling faculty' to take a Moral Leadership Training program for potential young leaders, to the sub-regions of the continent. *Contacts: Amina Dikedi <aminadkd@hotmail.com> and Joseph Karanja <joekaranja@insightkenya.com>*
- Creating a musical drama to tour Africa and to 'speak to Africa from within', with African musicians, dramatists and dancers. *Dorothy Tingu and Ndoni Kanyile*
- Producing a story-telling video, with African experience. *Amina Dikedi*
- Including French-speaking Africans and continuing the Great Lakes reconciliation dialogue. *Nicole Thieke <nthieke@gmx.de>*
- Connecting to southern African nations not represented at the Hoho. Abel Katito
- Involving the African diaspora in this process. *Amina Dikedi*

Contact: Abel Katito, Email: < mrazim@telco.co.zw> Box 238, Gweru, Zimbabwe. Phone/fax: +26 542 3936

2. Supporting Afghans

'For the last seven years my academic work has been on the condition of refugees, particularly women's health. (The life expectancy of an Afghan woman is 39)...For the past two and a half months I have been caught in a state of darkness and paralysis... I felt absolutely hopeless and useless... until I met Rajmohan and Usha Gandhi, who helped me come out of this darkness. I want to use this time in Panchgani to organise what I believe will be my lifetime task.'

Anila Daulatzai, USA/ Pakistan

Vision: We believe Initiatives of Change will play a distinctive role in supporting Afghans in their efforts in reconstruction and reconciliation in Afghanistan. We undertook to:

- Enable two Afghans to participate in the Caux Scholars Program for each year between 2002 2004.
- Have an initial visit by a small group to assess the situation, look at building an Afghan team and prepare the way for future visits.
- Look into creating a small presence in Peshawar, probably based within another NGO office, and ideally run by an Afghan or Pakistani.
- Explore what videos would be helpful. Some may already exist and some could be made, using inspiring stories of change both from overseas and from Afghanistan.
- Document stories of Afghans, such as the women who kept education going throughout the Taliban regime, and take some of these to the world media.
- Look into the possible role Russia and India might play in reconstruction and reconciliation, such as using Asia Plateau.
- Create a support fund based in USA, UK and Japan.

Contact: Fiona Leggat <fiona@london.mra.org.uk>

3. Day of 'Open homes, listening hearts' around the world

Vision: On Saturday 1 June 2002, under the theme '**Open homes, listening hearts**', everyone is encouraged to open their hearts and homes to a person, family or group from a community different from their own and with whom they would not normally interact, thereby crossing religious, ethnic, tribal or social barriers. That day can be the start of building many relationships for understanding, reconciliation and justice.

- A range of individual or community initiatives could be undertaken: such as sharing a meal at home or elsewhere, or arranging joint community gatherings.
- We recognise that there may be additional highpoints to focus on, linked to significant dates within various countries such as 22 August, 11 September, 13 December and 25 December.
- This occasion presents an opportunity to network with people of other groups, NGOs and the media.
- A bookmark with the vision, ways of implementing it, contact details and web sites, and car stickers, will be worked on, using the new IC or other logo.

Contacts: Jacqui Daukes <Jdaukes@compuserve.com> David Lancaster <lancasd@ozemail.com.au> and Matthias Freitag <matthias.freitag@arbeitsamt.de>

4. Poverty and Globalisation

Vision: With half of the world's population living on less than \$2 a day, the need to address the root causes of poverty is fundamentally a moral issue. Now for the first time in 20 years tackling poverty is becoming a global focus. Whilst recognising that governments, NGOs and international agencies have worked long and hard on the challenge, we believe IC has a particular contribution to make by emphasising change in people's character and motives.

- Set up further 'Dialogues on Development' at Asia Plateau and elsewhere to connect policy-makers and grassroots people with evidence of change and development. And bring this element into the poverty debate through participation at international conferences.
- Create 'honest conversations' between people and groups engaged in the globalisation debate. These would apply the principles learned through the race and reconciliation dialogues run by *Hope in the Cities*.
- Support those who struggle for the soul of industry, so that globalisation serves all of humanity including this year's Caux Initiative for Business conference on globalisation, the Caux conference on 'Human Security...' and the Caux Round Table.
- Strengthen and sustain anti-corruption approaches. For example: Russell Aneluwo plans a Clean Election Campaign in the run-up to Papua New Guinea's national elections in June. A three-month campaign in Gujarat is being shaped, to enlist 1000 people to take definite steps to tackle corruption.
- Encourage local IC/ MRA teams everywhere to become educated on issues of globalisation and poverty, drawing on refugees within their communities as 'God's messengers' to awaken the West to the realities of the world.
- To develop each of these points through e-mail networking in order to have working strategies ready for the October IC Consultation on global initiatives.

Contacts: Suresh Khatri <slkhatri@is.com.fj> Reg Barry <regbarry@otpoecd.ecape.gov.za> Mary Lean <marylean@compuserve.com>

5. Leadership training and development

Leadership is service. A leader is a midwife – you are facilitating another person's process, not running yours. If your motive is to serve, then you are a leader. IC can go beyond transactional leadership to transformational leadership; and beyond all definitions to spiritual leadership... Responsibility is the ability to respond. Krish Raval, UK, speaking at the Hoho

Vision: We saw our role as helping to facilitate the ongoing development and outreach of IC's global strategies, by exploring the current strengths within IC and the needs of future Leadership and Training Development. Areas of focus included:

- Evaluating the effectiveness of current programs, by examining facilitator skills, follow-up, drawing on best practices and the possibilities of over-lap and follow-on.
- Assessing internal IC training by appraising the skills required, noting the existing internal and external training opportunities, and the needs of specific countries.
- Examining new areas of development including an introductory package/ video, an induction course/package/video, a Global Youth Network web page outlining programs, the training of trainers, openings for 'new/young blood' and opportunities for younger representatives on official bodies.
- A detailed assessment of our time here has been sent to the ICC and a questionnaire on training needs will be sent out worldwide. This is being done in conjunction with the Personnel Support Team.

Contacts: Kristen Cibelli <kristen@london.mra.org.uk> Cathie-Jean Weeks <cjbweeks@hotmail.com>

6. Healing the wounds of history

Vision: To facilitate the development of true partnerships between historically divided groups, to create a harmonious and just society. We are committed to working together with people and organisations with similar visions. We felt that the following steps are basic to this process

- 1) listening to each other,
- 2) acknowledgment of past hurts,
- 3) apology and forgiveness and
- 4) the commitment to restore dignity and justice.

We acknowledge that this concept has been addressed in the Cyprus goals and that this process is underway in a number of countries. We decided on these initiatives:

- **KOREA**: dialoguing with students to help heal the divisions between Korea and Japan *Kim Jee-Hoon <rudolfh@hanmail.net>*
- MALAYSIA: continuing multi-faith and multicultural dialogues *Devi Basu* <*devi@tm.net.my*>
- **SAMOA**: healing families and restoring hope for the youth *Fetu Paulo* <*fetuintaiwan@hotmail.com*>
- VIETNAM/AUSTRALIA: initiating the building of positive relationships between young Vietnamese in Vietnam and Australia to help break the legacy of fear and mistrust *Loan Phan <phanloan@hotmail.com>*
- **INDIA**: creating awareness of the situation of the Adivasi (indigenous people of India) and to educate them through planned projects *Praveen Vasava* <*praveenvasava@yahoomail.com>*
- **CANADA/AUSTRALIA**: inviting Australians involved in the 'Journey of Healing' to interact with Native and non-Native Canadians to encourage the process of healing in Canada *Gwen McLean* <*gwenmclean@accesscom.ca>, John Bond* <*jbond@hubble.dialix.com.au>.*

7. Education

Vision: We realized that all the initiatives emanating from the Hoho inevitably involve parents, students and teachers. Our commitment, therefore, is to ensure their creative participation as it is on them that the future of society depends. Our commitments are:

- To initiate an international conference in 2003 (location and date to be decided) involving the growing network of teachers in India. *Contact: Zarin Virji <zarinv@vsnl.com>*
- To heighten the awareness of the need for children, from the earliest age, to learn about and experience cultures and faiths different from their own. *Contact: Tania Chatterjee <taniac@rediffmail.com>*

8. Asia Plateau Community

Vision: to establish at Asia Plateau a multifaith, multinational, cross-generational community. Internal searching and outward expression will characterize the community, which will seek to light a candle in the heart of every person it embraces. Initiatives of change in the fields of environment, business, education, family life and leadership training will emerge from this community.

- Begin by the end of this year, working towards a community of 15-25 people.
- Funds for scholarships named after Gordon Brown, Sidney Cook, Geoffrey Daukes and Stanley Shepherd will be raised to include those less privileged.
- Provide opportunities for those who see a need for bold departures from earlier approaches in order to make IC effective for the next generation.

Part of the concept is to use the natural environment that has grown up around Asia Plateau as an educational resource and as a means to interact with the town of Panchgani and its many schools, with surrounding villages, and with educational institutes of Maharashtra State and beyond.

- Structured partnerships will be established with education providers, particularly within environmental and agricultural education, for 'hands on' participation and to enhance formal education programs.
- The next step will be at the education conference at Asia Plateau in May 2002, with a 'technical' workshop to explore the concept and move towards a prospectus and business plan.

Contacts: Bhanu Kale <bhanukale@vsnl.com> and Luis Gomes <mra@scpl.net.in> regarding the community vision; and Ritu Angirish <rituangirish@rediffmail.com> or Alan Porteous <alan.porteous@paradise.net.nz> on the environmental proposal.

Committing together...

Shared visions and detailed plans do not become real without individual and collective commitment. There were many expressions of new life and inspiration:

A few days ago, like in the song, I received 'a telephone call from God', saying 'Beware of Mr Self-Pity. He is deadly'. Self-pity says to the mother who works so hard, 'You are just not appreciated', to the child, 'You are not loved', to the unemployed, 'No chance', to the divorced, 'No place', to the worried and lonely, 'You are doomed'... And to us, the IC family, 'Look how valuable you are, yet you are not recognised nor rewarded'. Let us not take our eyes off God and try to work things out by ourselves. Let us go ahead with the task he has put on our shoulders. For responsibilities are blessings... I go back to Uganda after renewing my contract with God to continue serving Him, not to think of myself but to live to make others great and to promote the work of MRA/ IC in my country, my continent and the world. **Dorothy Tingu, Uganda**

I want to renew my commitment to God... We sometimes feel trapped in a prison cell, but God has given us the key to open it from inside.

Edward Howard, South Africa

The Hoho has shown me the unbelievable potential of MRA... I think bigger now, and that only happened when I emptied myself and allowed God to take control. In MRA there's a lot of possibility for lateral thinking because there are so many things happening in different countries.

Nigel Heywood, Australia, with Action for Life

I had a call here. Three times God asked me to work fully with MRA. He woke me at 3am. He said, 'You always argue when I talk to you. Go back to your team in South Africa and do what I've asked you to do.'

Snowy Mohlala, South Africa

I am committed to be a shepherd – to give care and to witness to the new life. Ramez Salamé, Lebanon

Our greatest ability is often our availability... I have decided to nurture Initiatives of Change, to live in the risk zone and remove self-imposed limits.

Rob Wood, Australia

I leave with a new sense of belonging to this world family... I want to make my horizons wider again.

Christoph Keller, Switzerland

In my country there are many unmarried mothers. I am one of them. As a young mother I felt terrible and thought my life was wasted. Unlike other young girls, my parents got me to finish school but I still could not see any future. Sooner or later, something happened to my life through MRA. I began to see some light at the end of the tunnel. During this Hoho I got convicted that even I could make a difference in my country. My resolution is to get in touch with other young unmarried mothers in order to help them, by telling them about what I learnt through MRA/IC. I know it is not easy but faith and determination can bring meaning for life despite all the ups and downs.

Margaret Nderitu, Kenya

MRA has shown me light where there has been darkness. Hiwot Gebeyehu, Ethiopia

Over the years many have left our MRA work and fellowship... For various reasons, they handed in their resignations. How many of us, even here at the Hoho, are doing IC work but have resigned inwardly? The feeling has come up in me, 'Let them do it.' I am sorry for this attitude. I want to labour joyfully – even when the going gets rough.

Matthias Freitag, Germany

After many years of doing this work, on the plateau this morning I recommitted my life to God and to open my heart to other faiths and cultures. Luis Gomes, India

Does IC have the courage to accept to be a prophet voice for the world? Liu Ren-Jou, Taiwan

I have never lost my faith, nor my belief in MRA... But I have said, 'I'll do it my way'... I kept feeling the need for more commitment. Then came a stage when I was ready. But I waited to be asked... But I will not wait for an invitation any longer. Now I have committed myself to take on the things I feel deeply about. At the same time I will give serious thought to the ideas of my colleagues and make them my own... If there is no faith at the heart of IC, there is no IC. Asia Plateau is a stronghold of that faith. Everything else will follow from that... Among the last words of Frank Buchman were, 'I want to see the world governed by men governed by God. Why not let God run the whole world?' Can you ever have a bigger vision than that?

Dr Ravindra Rao, India

Carrying it forward...

- We recognise that many around the world are already engaged in these issues. We suggest reflecting on the eight visions, individually and with your team, so that they can be realised in your community and region. And then be in touch with the contact people listed.
- We constantly need deeper fellowship. 'Story-sharing' is a powerful means with which you can experiment.
- The process continues with the next Global Consultation on strategies in October 2002. Your thoughts and plans are needed to develop the visions and implement them.

Global Hoho team: via <slkhatri@is.com.fj>, <mikejeanbrown@compuserve.com>