

ACTION FOR LIFE NEWSLETTER #1

1st-7th November 2003
Panchgani, India

Dear Friends,

Namaste! At last, the great adventure of Action for Life 2 is under way. Having converged from all over the world on Asia Plateau, the Initiatives of Change centre in western India, our team of 41 people gathered this time last week for a formal inauguration of the program. We were treated to a classical Indian dance, and representatives from each continent in turn lit a wick of a traditional ceremonial lamp. Ren-Jou Liu of Taiwan, the initiator of the AfL program, used the words of Mahatma Gandhi - "My life is my message" - and Martin Luther King - "I have a dream" - to offer a challenge to each of us: "What is YOUR message? What is YOUR dream?" As each of the participants introduced themselves, representing 19 countries, it was clear that this was an extraordinary group of people and that we were in for an amazing time together.

That evening we heard from each other of the struggles which some had faced to be able to join us. Kofi Bassaw from Ghana was finally given an Indian visa at the close of business on the day before his 5am departure for India, having raised his necessary funds only in the previous two weeks. When Pilar Griffin from Costa Rica approached the principal of her school (on her first day in a new job) to announce her resignation, she told him, "If you want a better world, you have to help me", then added that she needed to continue working for the remaining month until her departure in order to raise money. She and her husband, Fredric, finally found a tenant for their home in Seattle just three hours before leaving for the airport. Katia Zirjanova from Siberia had spent the first half of that week battling with the Indian Embassy in Moscow, as one hurdle after another delayed the issue of her visa. With still no visa in sight on the day before her scheduled departure, her despair was lightened when a chance advertisement on her computer screen in an internet café brought up a photo of the Taj Mahal, with the caption, "Your guru says this is your destination." The visa was issued at 6pm that night. We laughed to relive all these experiences, yet recognised with gratitude that it had taken many miracles to get us all in the same room! We continue to think and pray for some who have not yet been able to join us, particularly four Sri Lankan students who await government permission to participate in AfL.

The following morning we assembled at 5:30am and walked in silence up to the tableland overlooking Asia Plateau for a 'dawn dedication' of ourselves and the coming nine months together. As we shared prayers from different languages, faiths and traditions, then took time alone in silence, we were awed both by the beauty of the vista and by the sense among us of unity, commitment and expectation.

We are grateful to have already had some links with the local community. Last Sunday, friends from Panchgani town and further afield came in for afternoon tea and many fascinating encounters followed. The last guests stayed for four hours. Then during the week each of us was linked to one of the staff here at Asia Plateau, most of whom come from nearby villages and represent the 90 percent of India's population who do not speak English. With the help of translators we were able to share something of our respective lives, and during the coming week we will spend a night in their homes and meet their families.

Meanwhile Asia Plateau's regular program of conferences and seminars continues. This week we have enjoyed the chance to interact with 100 post-graduate students of international business who were here for a four-day 'Effective Living and Leadership' seminar. On one evening we heard from each other about Action for Life and about different aspects of India.

Our AfL program has centred on a series of 'conversations' around the core principles of Initiatives of Change, and this week we have explored the concept and process of personal change - the first step to creating a better world. We have also spent time on the questions of

what we believe most deeply and how it shapes our lives, and shared where we have been touched or challenged by those with different beliefs. One morning we joined with the 100 students for a moving time of multi-faith prayer: it seemed so natural to be drawn together in this way. Evenings have included starting to hear each other's life stories, which will continue during these two months in which we prepare for the outreaches in India and East and South-East Asia. Each Monday we have a day of silence and fasting - you are all welcome to join us in this, wherever you are!

We are so grateful to the many who have had a part in enabling this program to happen, and we are conscious of the privilege and responsibility that has been entrusted to us. Please keep us in your thoughts and prayers.

Stay tuned!

Kedar Adkar (India), Kofi Bassaw (Ghana), Pravin Bhosale (India), Liliana Botnaru (Moldova), Zoryana Borbulevych (Ukraine), Mike and Jean Brown (Australia), Sophiep Chat (Cambodia), Amitabha Das (India), Natasha Davis (Australia), Christina DeAngelis (Australia/USA), John Freebury (Canada), Dilena Freire (Brazil), Violeta Frimu (Moldova), Bidisha Guha (India), Ilze Gutmane (Latvia), Fredric and Pilar Griffin (USA/Costa Rica), Peter Heyes (Canada), Nigel Heywood (Australia), Shabeen Hussain (India), Will Jenkins (USA), Ji-Sun Jung (South Korea), Yeon-Yuk Jeong (South Korea), Suresh and Leena Khatri (Fiji/India), Vuth Kim (Cambodia), Chris Lancaster (Australia), Keith Last (UK), Ngan Le (Vietnam), Nandor Lim (Malaysia), Hsiao-Yun Liu (Taiwan), Ren-Jou Liu (Taiwan), Min-Hui Na (South Korea), Wambui Nguyo (Kenya), Wal and Val Nuske (Australia), Bhavesh Patel (UK), Laura Trevelyan (UK), Katia Zirjanova (Russia).

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