

ACTION FOR LIFE NEWSLETTER #25

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Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur

Assalamu ali kum!

Indonesia is the world's largest Muslim nation - 90% of its 220 million population. Based at the State Islamic University in Jakarta, the large young team who hosted us there are perhaps unique in Initiatives of Change's global fellowship - and therefore significantly placed for a role in addressing the urgent global need for bridge-building between Muslims and non-Muslims. During our visit last month it was a privilege and inspiration to experience and share in what they are taking on. Over 50 people had been involved in the planning for our visit, and many of them were there to welcome us with drums and singing when we arrived. It was immediately clear that we were in for a rich time, engaging all our hearts and energies.

Our programme had been organised with two main components. A series of "interactive dialogues" were planned to support the team's longer-term strategy of building trust and understanding between different religious and ethnic communities; so we visited a Confucian centre, the Indonesian Buddhist Council, an Islamic boarding school, the State Islamic University, a Christian University and a Pentecostal Church, as well as the University of Indonesia. These sessions, of up to three hours, ended with time for silence and sharing in small groups, often drawing out deep personal struggles and decisions. One student decided that on that day, his 21st birthday, the time had come to put right his relationship with his brother. Another recognised that "I am a different person on the university campus and at home. I need to show more love to my family."

We deeply appreciated the sense that we were working together with our Indonesian friends in all that we did. Some of them accompanied us on each of these visits, and we often arrived to find others waiting for us at the venue. There was ample opportunity to get to know each other better during the 35 hours or so spent in our mini-bus negotiating Jakarta's notorious traffic jams. The experience was more akin to a mobile sauna - or, as one person put it, a chance for "incubating friendships".

The second element of the schedule took us out of the city to help lead a two-day "Life Matters" course: "Being on a bus going up from sweaty Jakarta to cool and green Puncak felt as if we were advancing one level to heaven. Fresh air, misty hills covered with tropical forest, and a huge rented house crammed with course participants and facilitators - this was the setting for two full days of introspection, reflection and sharing, including sessions on "Identity - Who am I?", "Leadership" and "Goals and decision-making". We AFLers struggled to keep up with the many who rose at 4:30am for prayers, some of whom then headed for the kitchen to prepare breakfast for 50 people! For me personally these two days felt like coming home, and brought many memories of Foundations for Freedom Visiting Courses and the team back in Novosibirsk. Getting to know the participants of this course; hearing them share about family issues, false images, future steps they decided to take; watching apologies being made - all spiced with tears, laughter and songs till late at night -that energy and sincerity has moved me a lot more than I could have expected." (Katia Zirjanova)

Who is this new Indonesian IC 'team'? And where did they come from? In 1992 a small MRA team from Malaysia, Taiwan, Japan and Australia went to Jakarta and invited some students to an Asia Pacific Youth Conference (APYC) in Malaysia. Among them was Siti Horiyah, who later married a Malaysian she met at that conference. In 2002, Siti and her husband, Sabar, in faith took a small group of the first Action for Life to Jakarta for an intensive five-day program. As a result four Indonesians came for a second APYC in Malaysia. Among them student leaders Bahrul Ilmi and Dadan Nugraha decided to create an IC group in their country. Less than two years later, they have weekly meetings, a committee structure undertaking various initiatives with shared leadership, and a tiny rented 'IC' centre where six of the young men live in community. Their meetings start with a quiet time and include sharing on basic steps of personal change. Most of them are students at State Islamic University, having come through Islamic boarding schools in rural or village areas. They prepared for

our visit thoroughly, sometimes meeting till 3am, detailing our programme in multiple spreadsheets. Yet they obviously enjoy themselves and break into loud singing at any excuse. In between they keep to their schedule of Muslim prayers. Someone in AfL drew a parallel to a group of students in Oxford in the 1920s with their infectious faith and action. Could this be a similar growth point for this century?

"Is it possible for me to describe their passion? God provided us with a surprise gift in Indonesia, where I did not expect it. The most valuable thing for me was making friends who are learning and discovering their own purpose of life, as I am also doing. One person said, 'life is a whole learning and discovering process.' Before leaving, another told me, 'I felt something is missing in my life, but after the AfL team has been here with me I might know what it is.'" (Min-Hui Na)

Ten days was nowhere near long enough to do justice to our friends in Indonesia, and we were glad that Jean, Clara, Suresh and Altaf were able to stay in Jakarta for up to a week longer - a chance to have more time with individuals and to follow up on some of the links established by the whole group.

"I was inspired by the passionate enthusiastic work of women in Indonesia. We had the opportunity to meet with the women's youth wing of Nahdlatul Ulama, a network which is headed by former President Wahid and, with 40 million members, is the largest Muslim organisation in the world. The meeting was chaired by Wahid's daughter Inayah, a gutsy straight-to-the-point ball of fire who outlined the work of the organisation. It includes women's education, a respect for other religions, capacity building, social work/crisis relief, promotion of arts and sports, and poverty reduction. A poignant moment came when a Christian pastor from our delegation was invited to close the meeting with a prayer for peace. We then all sang together: 'It's better to light one candle than to curse the darkness, Better to let its bright light show where you stand, For its glow will melt the dark night like the coming of a new dawn, And hope will be born from that small flame in your hand.'" (Clara Cheong)

"I was touched by the love and companionship of the team. I stayed with two sisters, Ridisalita and Lina, who later on offered their house for monthly meetings of the IC team. A young boy who had cheated his uncle for many years said that he will say sorry and pay back the money. Suresh and I spent time with very receptive and bright students of Mohamdiya students union; Dr. Habib Chirzin and his wife Hindun; and Sinta and her mother. I believe my time with the team, especially with Bachrul, Huda, Roy, Dandin, Hedayatullah, Alman, Dadan, and Teguh, was a blessing." (Altaf Khan)

Those who left Indonesia earlier had the privilege of spending a few days with Jit Mun Chong in Johor Bahru, at the southern tip of the Malaysian peninsula. Jit Mun travelled with AfL1 in South-East Asia, then left his high-calibre computer programming job in Singapore to give a year to Initiatives of Change in the UK. His expertise was crucial in the development of the global web site <[www.iofc.org](http://www.iofc.org)>.

Our team has now reassembled in Kuala Lumpur, and it is wonderful to be 'back at home' with the Malaysian MRA-IC team. We are touched by their kindness and generosity in opening their hearts and homes to us. On top of their busy schedules they still have had the time and energy to co-ordinate an amazing programme for us. The Malaysian team includes Malays, Indians and Chinese, and their working together is a practical demonstration of the unity they hope for in Malaysia. We look forward to being honorary members of this group during the coming month here, and will have more to write in our next newsletter!

With our best wishes to each one of you,

Altaf, Aparna, Chris, Clara, Ilze, Jean, John, Katia, Mike, Min-Hui, Nandor and Suresh

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