

Action for Life Newsletter

30th June 2005

Dear people of the world,

"It's better to light one candle than to curse the darkness." Chinese proverb.

A small team of AfL participants was invited to join the **28th International Odawara Conference** in Japan. **Nandor Lim** (Malaysia), **Vuth Kim** (Cambodia), **Aparna Khatri** (Fiji) and **Nigel Heywood** (Australia) from AfL 2 were joined by **Ahmad Fikri Arief** (Indonesia) and arrived on the 8th of June in Tokyo. We were introduced to the fresh taste of Sushi, wasabe and soy sauce and were treated to a traditional Japanese tea ceremony (Cha Do) served to us by the IofC ladies.

The conference with 89 participants was a time for people to connect from all walks of life and explore what their commitments were and how their relationships in family, work and across national boundaries could be used for a greater purpose. The AfL team shared their experiences during the conference, but by far the most important times were the friendships made over meals, in sharing groups and in the traditional Japanese hot baths.

A dynamic young Japanese, **Masaya Onimaru**, spoke passionately about the issue of small firearms, child soldiers and landmine removal, for which he has set up an NGO. He has worked in Cambodia and parts of Africa, and gives talks around the world to raise awareness. He started on this difficult path when he heard a talk at university that everyone has a purpose for their life and they must search for how to unfold it.

Nandor interviewed **Mrs. Takahashi**, who was one of our generous hosts. She shared how her father's dramatic change had affected her family as a child. In 1946 after the war her father met the ideas of MRA in his travels to America. He was inspired by the idea that change could start with himself. On his return home he quit smoking and drinking and apologised to his wife for the way he had treated her. Her mother became a much more confident and happy person and their home became open to friends from all over the world. At the age of five Mrs. Takahashi's small world was opened up and now she leads the IofC ladies group in Japan, conducts musical prayer and holds family concerts to help develop young people. We are grateful for her and her family's hospitality to us on this trip.

We visited several groups of students in elementary schools and Universities - Vuth shares his experience: "We went to Hakone Elementary school. We were welcomed by 16 teachers and 32 students. As we entered the room we had one child to look after each of us. I was touched by the little girl who cared for me. Even though she had little English she tried to talk with me and presented me with a picture she had painted. She took me to the dining room and helped me with lunch. I felt close to this new friend as we tried to chat about our families over food. What would the world be like if each of us started to care for each other in these simple ways?"

We were privileged to stay with caring host families after the conference in Odawara. These connections on the personal level with Japanese life and generosity were a privilege and we hope to keep building on these friendships with more exchanges in the future. There are many people we are grateful for in providing for us on this trip but our main guru and inspiration was a **Mr Kiyoshi Nagano** who embodies the true spirit of the Samurai. Thankyou.

Bhavesh Patel (UK) travelled to Kenya for the Under 40s gathering (see May newsletter at <http://www.afl.iofc.org/news/nl2005-05.php>) and to Russia to help run two courses, then visited the team in Moldova. During this period he observed the struggles that the different IofC teams are going through; below is part of his reflection:

"I have been thinking about how teams sustain themselves. Sometimes groups jump too easily into action because of the need to do something, it can be promoted by us ie. 'change the world'. However the 'starting with yourself' is key here. A group needs to put a lot of emphasis on becoming a community. This means not only becoming friends, but going deeper and struggling with each other and becoming vulnerable and really learning to accept and love each other. These types of relationships will be where people start changing, challenging, and supporting each other. Then come the ideas and actions that will take the group forward even more."

At the same time **Christina DeAngelis** was travelling through Uganda, Rwanda and Kenya. She took part in the Women's Peace Conference at Lake Victoria in Uganda. In her report she writes of her trepidation of opening her heart to those in suffering, but living amongst those at the conference showed her something new:

"During those five days, I went through my own transformation and learned that opening my heart to the pain of others did not lead to despair. I understood that what is required is not that I take on the suffering of the world, but rather that I be responsible for the small part I am asked to play in making it better. In opening my heart to the pain, I was then able to also see the hope that allows these amazing women to not only go on, but do incredible things."

A fuller report of the conference from Christina is on our website at <http://www.afl.iofc.org/news/ni2005-06-20.php>

Action for Life 3 continues to roll towards its starting date on November the 1st: please keep us in your prayers.

Until next time,

Nigel Heywood
on behalf of the AfL coordinating team

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