

# HOPE IN THE CITIES



Working towards an inclusive society

*December 2006*

*As we approach the beginning of 2007, we wish to both look back at the past months and also plan together our programme for the New Year.*

*One of the challenges we face is how to start building trust across the world's divides. Gerald Henderson gives us an insight below into two visitors to the UK, who have a life-changing story of how this can be done:*

The Lord Mayor of Liverpool, Councillor Joan Lang, hosted a Reception at Liverpool Town Hall for two remarkable men from Nigeria, Imam Ashafa and Pastor Wuye, who shared their amazing personal journey from bitter conflict and riots to reconciliation and peace building in their country. They showed the documentary film, 'The Imam and the Pastor', which tells their story. Among those attending were Members of the Liverpool City Council, Muslim and Christian leaders and other faith representatives, including the President and the Secretary of the Merseyside Council of Faiths. Business, professional and community representatives, including leaders of the Liverpool Nigerian Association took part.

The Lord Mayor, in welcoming them, said that their story was both 'heart-rending' and 'a breath of fresh air'. Speaking of their journey of reconciliation, Councillor Lang said,

"I was bowled over by their faith." Both men had been active on opposite sides of the clashes in their city, Kaduna, heading up militant groups. The Imam had lost several relatives and his spiritual adviser and the Pastor had had his hand cut off in the conflict.

In response to The Lord Mayor, both men underlined how they had 'to take risks' and reach out 'for the sake of our children and future generations'.

The Imam said, "Once you have started, you need to have the courage to continue to follow the path of holiness." The film tells of the challenges they faced and the significant outcomes.

The Nigerians had just come from the World Premiere of the film at the United Nations in New York, which was followed by a showing in the Houses of Parliament in London.

The day before The Town Hall event the Liverpool Hope University Desmond Tutu Centre for War and Peace Studies received the guests for a showing of their film to university and sixth form students and other invited guests, followed by lively discussions.

The Imam and the Pastor, a 40-minute documentary film, is available on DVD, from FLT Films, 24 Greencoat Place, London SW1P 1RD – £15-99

*A recent dialogue initiative has taken place in the St Anns neighbourhood of Nottingham, Richard Hawthorne and Raj Sharma sent us the following report:*

**Nottingham  
St Ann's Community Dialogue  
18 November 2006**

Through the single partition room dividers we could hear the tapping of little feet and voices of young children enjoying themselves. In the main room, around thirty adults had started the day introducing themselves. Amongst them were mothers and members of the refugee committee, many of whom were meeting for the first time.

After an initial ice-breaker, the dialogue started by getting the group to identify and talk about what we are afraid of facing and what we are frightened of losing. This revealed some deep concerns about losing local community identity, hope and services, coupled with losing our children to drugs and crime.

It was felt that the perception of the area as somewhere there was high gun crime,

drugs culture and crime needed to be challenged by getting the media to report on the actual situation in the area. There was acknowledgement that there has been a lot of financial resources put into the area's capital schemes. However, these have felt ineffective as they have been targeted at the physical environment and not at changing human attitudes, behaviour and up-skilling. There remains a need for each of us to do more to open up our community buildings and become more inclusive. In general people get on well but there is a danger of people getting into a downward spiral resulting from peer pressure; ethnic tensions and transient population (e.g. students) and local services being developed and/or decided by people who do not live in the area.

The morning session came to a conclusion with a fantastic lunch lovingly prepared by Steff Webber and other helpers. We also said thank you and goodbye to some of the mothers and refugee ladies who had to leave for domestic reasons and or other commitments. Their contribution had been very welcome and they had helped identify key issues for the group to address in the afternoon. The Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Racial Equality Council were also using this occasion to inform some local research being undertaken in Nottingham. The REC staff shadowed the facilitators with a view to undertaking further dialogues in other areas of Nottingham, albeit after some further training through HiC.

The afternoon session focused on looking to a positive future for the area. The things that people appreciated and valued about St Anns were friendship, hospitality, pride in the area, community spirit, social and family networks and the Holding Hands Unity event. In terms of the environment, people valued that the area had a diverse range of community facilities for all ethnic groups and the largest allotment gardens in Europe. Despite the negative image of a crime ridden area, people had a sense of belonging and felt safe. The aspirations for the future were to empower local people to act positively for the area by giving them a voice and involving them in the decision-making process. It was felt that a significant effort needs to be made to work

with the media and change their perception of the area by feeding them positive stories that they then publish. People valued family life and desired more family-based activities and events to take place.

The afternoon session took longer than had been anticipated and there was insufficient time to develop an action and or next steps plan. However, there was general agreement that there should be a follow up meeting where the aspirations of people could be further explored and turned into local projects.

The evaluation completed by seventeen of the thirty participants indicated that the white, black Caribbean, Asian, mixed race and other communities were represented with an even gender split. The average age was forty-nine, clearly identifying the need to engage younger people! There were numerous positive comments about the day. Two comments capture the ethos of the feedback: "A community is something that keeps us alive. To keep it growing well and healthy, it needs to be nurtured, protected and cared for by all." Secondly, "We need each others' input so as to rebuild our community."

It was a challenging, but rewarding day that reinforces the value of honest dialogue and giving local people an opportunity to voice their views and identify their own solutions for their area. It is anticipated that a follow up meeting with people who attended the dialogue, and a further dialogue in another part of Nottingham, will both be held in the near future.

*Very sadly, Meili Hawthorne from Nottingham passed away on October 5<sup>th</sup>. She has been such an enormous part of the HiC work in UK. The following gives a flavour of her life and work:*

**"Farewell to special lady who helped so many folk"** was the headline in the *Nottingham Evening Post*. Relays of tributes, songs and music resounded at two Thanksgiving Services for Meili Hawthorne. They highlighted a life of Christian faith lived out for others at the heart of many different communities.

Jacqueline, a refugee Judge from East Africa, spoke movingly of how Meili had opened her arms and home for her and others, and given them hope and love.

In recent years 'Hope in the Cities' has been a key part of her commitment to 'Initiatives of Change'. Much of it was overseas in Switzerland, Nigeria, France and Hong Kong before her move to Nottingham to marry Richard 24 years ago. Her warm-hearted skill with music, hospitality, secretarial support and friendship with strangers from different cultures, will be sorely missed. Her spirit, however, continues to carry us forward with Dialogue work and another 'Unity Day' in St.Anns.

*Monica McIntosh sent the following report from Harrow:*

As London Boroughs look for ways to build stronger communities, can the Hope in the Cities' Dialogue Training and Facilitation be used as a tool in Harrow to connect communities and to build networks of trust across racial, religious and social divides as part of community cohesion?

Some of my HiC outreach work has been in Harrow, with the Community Cohesion Management Group as well as engaging at grassroots level. Community Cohesion is a real priority for Harrow as we explore how to capitalise on our diversity and celebrate what we have in common.

Harrow is one of only nine local authorities in England and Wales with an ethnic majority population, which changes every day. Harrow also has the most diverse make up of religions in the country.

How can Voluntary Sector groups support and complement the Community Cohesion work being carried out by Harrow Council in a way that brings about trust and understanding within the widest community?

The Community Cohesion Management group are from the Voluntary sector and the Council. The Voluntary sector has the

opportunity to look for gaps in the services and make recommendations for improvement but we have to ask ourselves, are we just 'ticking sheets' for the authority? Are we really meeting the demands of a multi-ethnic, multi-faith society for a cohesive community?

We have the opportunity, both individually and collectively, in this group to bring about positive change in the way the Council engages with the voluntary sector which could lead to real cohesive community. The HiC dialogue and facilitation training, based on trust and honest conversation, could be the tool that supports and complements this process. It would enable people to discuss and understand the root causes of why people may feel powerless and voiceless in today's society.

The voluntary sector has an essential contribution to make in Harrow, and what is urgently required is a sustainable process of HiC dialogue and facilitation training which could enable honest conversations to take place, leading hopefully, to the building of trust and the creation of a sustainable network of people from all sectors.

*Would anyone who would like to and help to make this happen, please contact us at the address at the end of the newsletter.*

**Hope in the Cities has over the years been supported by the voluntary contributions of individuals who acknowledge the importance of its work in building trust relationships within and between communities and want to support its outreach work. Donations may be made to: 'Hope in the Cities' and sent to 28 Heath Road, Liverpool L19 4UF**

*Hope in the Cities wishes everyone a very Happy Christmas and looks forward to working with you in the New Year.*

Hope in the Cities can be contacted at 24 Greencoat Place, London SW1P 1RD  
Tel 0207 798 6000 or by email at [hopeinthecities@uk.iofc.org](mailto:hopeinthecities@uk.iofc.org)

## HiC in Switzerland

Over 400 delegates from 60 countries gathered at Mountain House in Caux, Switzerland in July 2006 - for a conference themed "A Clean and Just Africa".

The principle feature of the conference was the 'closed' dialogue sessions that followed the plenary and. provided the safe space for delegates to explore the depth of a troubled Africa

24 facilitators were given 3 days, pre-conference training before leading the daily, 2-hour sessions, which ran through the spine of the 10-day conference. Space was also provided for facilitators to meet as a group, to share some of the practical difficulties but also to share good practice!

HiC were asked to train the facilitators and take part in the conversations. One participant said that the concept of searching for the answer together and not going to the table knowing the answer was the key to a dramatic change in his personal and professional life.

Denzil Nurse

## 2007 Events – International

The Reconciliation Triangle. March 30 will be the unveiling of the Reconciliation Sculpture in Richmond, Virginia, in the presence of representatives from Liverpool and the Republic of Benin. A programme of educational links is developing as one further step in the process to seek to heal the legacy of the Atlantic Slave Trade.