



WALKING ALONGSIDE

An effort to offer a hand of friendship to asylum seekers – those in detention – was the focus of the first in a new series of Greencoat Forums, held at the IofC centre in Greencoat Place, London, on 12 October.

Speakers were Felicity Dick, Chairman, and Mary Lean, Vice-Chairman, of the Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group. The Crawley-based charity is one of five winners of The Guardian Charity awards 2004* – out of a field of 700 selected for consideration.

32nd in world league table

Setting the wider scene, Mary Lean pointed out that all the great world faiths contained very strong traditions of welcoming the stranger. “Somehow this has become forgotten in Christian Britain,” she said. Fears of being overwhelmed by a sea of asylum-seekers, whipped up by some politicians and sections of the popular press, create instead an atmosphere of suspicion and even hostility. The result was that “we see the floods and we don’t see the faces”. The answer to the often-heard question, “Why do they all come here?” was, “They don’t!” In terms of the “burden” different countries carry in receiving

refugees (number of up-rooted people supported in relation to population, size and GDP), the UK comes in at only 32nd in the world league table.

A litmus test

Sometimes, said Mary Lean, official treatment seemed to add up to “deterrence by destitution”. Currently asylum-seekers are not allowed to work and have no choice (unless taken in by relatives or friends) of where they live. “It is true that not every applicant has a good case and not everyone tells the truth – but in our desire not to be a soft touch it is often the most genuine who suffer,” she said. “It



John Leggat

Mary Lean

has been well said that how we treat asylum-seekers is a litmus test of the health of our democracies.”

Felicity Dick said that Tinsley House at Gatwick Airport, which holds up to 150 people, was the first purpose-built detention centre in the UK. There are now 13 centres, not all purpose-built, across the

country. She assumed that the main reason for detaining people was to ensure that they left the country if their application for asylum had failed. "But some are detained on arrival and who is and who is not detained seems to be totally arbitrary." Detention was always traumatic, especially as in the majority of cases no time-limit is given. "Typically, detainees are picked up at short notice from their homes or place of work – often in the early hours – with no time to put their affairs in order. This might involve the care of children or the fate of a parked car or possessions left behind. It can be quite a cruel procedure."

Respect

The group has two full-time workers and 80 volunteer visitors. Their task is to "get alongside" any detainee asking for a visit, to be a listening ear and to help in any way possible. This can vary from helping to find legal assistance to providing toiletries or warm clothes. They may visit them in hospital or attend hearings. "Many are under stress and frightened of being returned," said Felicity Dick. "What they tell us they most appreciate is the respect our volunteers and staff accord them." In a typical year 800 may request a visitor.

Popular opinion?

The Gatwick group sometimes has to turn away volunteers, so many are wanting to help. "If this is a sign

that there is a considerable body of opinion out there which wants to give asylum-seekers respect, why is this not reflected in the 'popular opinion' so often quoted to us by politicians and the press?" asked Mary Lean. A vigorous question and answer session followed. Some who spoke from the floor had themselves been refugees.

Paul Williams

** The day after the Greencoat Forum, 13 October, The Guardian carried feature articles about The Guardian Charity Award winners. "Journey's aid" was the headline over an article by Saba Salman, who had interviewed Mary Lean. The article quoted Lean as saying, "Our aim is to show people in detention that someone cares... We think of it as walking alongside them."*

JORDAN VISIT – A DIFFERENT VIEW

The view of the world from Jordan is very different from UK, with Israel and Palestine to the West, and Iraq to the East, and with a relatively brief but unsettled history as an independent country. I spent 10 days there at the end of September accompanying a dynamic octogenarian, Mohsen Hussein from Egypt, and his Palestinian wife Lamia El-Shawwa. They had asked me to join them in meeting the Jordanians who have had contact with IofC/MRA to discover whether they would like to

create a team in Jordan, and to link up with those in Lebanon and Egypt.

We met six of those who had participated in the British-Arab student exchanges in the '80s and early '90s, most of whom are now university lecturers. We also met a number of senior figures who have participated in Agenda for Reconciliation conferences or in the Dialogues initiated by Rajmohan Gandhi between Muslims and non-Muslims in Caux in 2002, and in Morocco

earlier this year. Mohsen's expression of the need of the 'four absolutes' to counter division and corruption which is weakening the Arab countries, elicited an eager response and in a matter of days a meeting had been arranged which was attended by ten people in addition to ourselves.

We also had the honour of meeting HRH Prince El-Hassan bin Talal, the brother of the late King Hussein. He spoke with great appreciation of the late Dr Charis Waddy, author of *The Muslim Mind*, as standing among those Orientalists who articulated a positive vision for the Muslim world. He had been a member of the invitation committee for the Dialogue in Caux, and has offered to host a similar occasion in Amman. His passion is for more dialogue between scholars and NGOs in



Mohsen Hussein, HRH Prince El-Hassan, Peter Riddell

order to create imaginative solutions to the challenges the world faces.

Peter Riddell

NORWAY VISIT

Imam Abduljalil and Jamila Sajid from Brighton visited Oslo from 7-12 October. They met the Norwegian Prime Minister, the Norwegian Parliament's Committee on Local Government and the Bishop of Oslo. After meeting three Imams and other leaders from Oslo mosques, they expressed a unanimous wish for continued contact and closer co-operation.

A full-page interview in the Oslo daily *Vaart Land* quoted Imam Sajid: "People have been given the power to change. If we seek guidance from God, we will create peace instead of chaos."

THE UK WEBSITE

One of the biggest IofC 'publications' in the UK is our website, www.uk.iofc.org. Over 700 different people visit it each month, and around 4,000 pages are 'read' every month. It gives IofC-related news and a diary of forthcoming events. It offers stories of individuals who have experienced a change in their lives. A new section of the site chronicles the lives of MRA pioneers.

The site was completely redesigned at the start of this year, as part of the new 'family' of IofC websites around the world which use the latest technology to manage the growing amount of information carried on these websites. Along with the global IofC website (www.iofc.org), which has content in six languages, it shares material with the new United States website (www.us.iofc.org), and with the 'For A Change' site (www.forachange.co.uk) which has the most visitors of any IofC site. As part of this growing collaboration, a new Hope in the Cities site will be launched soon, and a new site for IofC in France.



Let's take a whirlwind tour through the site. On the homepage you will find a brief description of Initiatives of Change, three featured items, and links to the main sections. If you want to know more about the ideas of IofC, there is a brief introduction, the full text of a booklet 'A Moral and Spiritual Re-awaken-

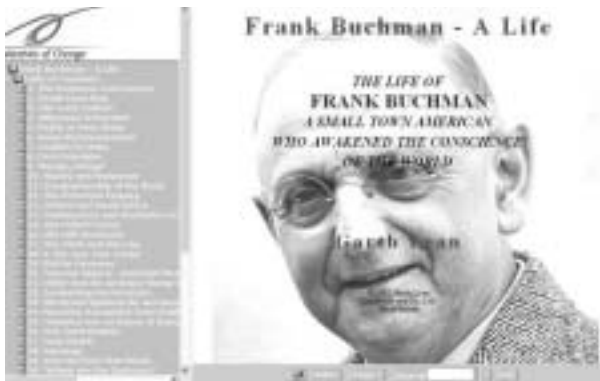
ing', and the new pamphlet 'The Sound of Silence'. You can also browse through the 'People' section giving stories of how a personal decision can have profound implications.

The history of MRA/IofC is covered in some detail. There is a link to the 'Buchman Online' website which carries the full text of Garth Lean's biography of MRA's founder, Frank Buchman. This is fully

searchable, and you can browse its chapters by theme.

The 'Newsroom' carries news items, 'commentaries' on topical subjects, an archive of the 'UK Newsletter', and reports such as the UK Annual Review. There are many other

useful resources, including descriptions of books and videos. You can buy these from the 'online shop' on our global website, paying with a credit or debit card.



The 'Get Involved' section lists IofC events around the country, plus courses, conferences and other opportunities for those who might wish to work with IofC for a longer period. If you are looking for someone to be in contact with in your area of the country, there is a map of the UK with contact information for most regions. There is a facility to subscribe for free regular email updates

from the website, so that you can keep informed about news and events.

This brief tour shows, we hope, what a valuable resource this website is. Please keep your eye on it and tell your friends about it. Please also send the site editors (**Edward Peters and Mike Smith**) any ideas – or items – for the site. We would particular welcome news from your area which could be included, and dates of forthcoming events which are open to the public. If you would be interested in helping edit the site, or know of someone who might, please also be in touch with us.

SEOUL VISIT

One September day in 1983, my wife, Elizabeth, and I were asked if we could have a South Korean to stay in our home for a week. In the end he lived with us for nine months. Through him we learned a lot about his country and its people and over the past twenty years have entertained many Koreans, young and old, some just for a meal and others to stay with us for a period. In 1988 we both attended an MRA conference there and in the intervening years we have also met many Koreans at the Caux conferences.

Lunch in Parliament

So it was a great joy to me to be able to visit Seoul, the capital, from 26 September to 7 October. I went with Ren-Jou Liu from Taiwan and part of the visit was to accompany Dr Cornelio Sommaruga, President of the International Association of IofC. With Dr Sommaruga we were given a welcome dinner by the board of IofC/MRA Korea, we spoke at a breakfast meeting for 40 people, were received and given lunch in the parliament and entertained to dinner by the Swiss Ambassador.

Among many interesting people we met were Venerable Mother Park Chung-Soo, a Won-Buddhist nun who has been given many awards by her own government and by other governments for her humanitarian work. I was able to

visit a boarding school she has established for children who have been excluded from the regular schools, and the site of a school she is building for 320 teenagers, boys and girls who have escaped from North Korea.

Hopes for the Future

It was most encouraging to meet a group of young men and women in their twenties and thirties who are applying the ideas of Initiatives of Change in their own work and family situations. They gave a presentation of the challenges they face working together as a team and then each one shared how they had met the ideas of IofC, what changes they had experienced and their hopes for the future.

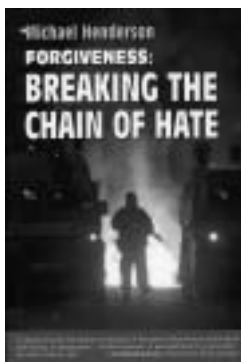
Korea with its population of 47 million in the South and 23 million in the North is neighbour to the giants of China to the west, Russia to the north and Japan to the east. They live with the reality of a divided country where communication between the two sides is almost impossible, but with the hope that one day their country will be reunited.

David Locke

STUDENT DEBATE

Mike Smith and Imad Karan, a post-graduate student from Gaza, were invited to take part in a recent student debate on *Globalisation and Faith* at the London School of Economics. (Continued on page 8)

BOOKS for giving this Christmas



Forgiveness - breaking the Chain of Hate

'It effects change. A powerful book'
 Archbishop Desmond Tutu.
Special offer: £8-00

Like a Cork out of a Bottle

Reflections by Brian Boobbyer. 40 chapters on faith, nature & literature, illustrated
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No Longer Down Under
 Stories of Australians creating change
 by Mike Brown **£10-00**

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Mike suggested that four core values needed globalising; justice and fairness; forgiveness; "the inner Jihad" or struggle against self and silent reflection that leads to inspired action.

The debate was an outcome of a Christian-Muslim Youth Camp which was part of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Listening Initiative in Christian-Muslim Relations.

HELLO!

My name is Angela María Sánchez, but everybody calls me Killy. I am from Guatemala, a beautiful country in Central America. I am a kindergarten teacher and family counsellor. I travelled and worked with "Gente que Avanza" in Latin America for three years. During that time I heard about IofC and I liked it very much, because GQA shares the same values and principles with IofC. Now I am having the great experience of living in Oxford and working on the Spanish IofC Website. I am learning a lot. Every morning I say, "Thank you God for this gift!" because being here is God's answer to my prayers.



"If you want to make the world a better place, start with yourself," said Mary Lean in an interview by BBC Radio 4 PM news programme. She was speaking from the IofC stand at the European Social Forum in London.

BOOKS

Life and Work, the magazine of the Church of Scotland reviewed *Like A Cork Out of a Bottle* (See Page 7), describing the book as "a fascinating insight into an English hero".

Child of the Soil, tells the story of South African Letlapa Mphahlele's life as a freedom fighter. (Letlapa was featured in Newsletter UK, September 2004) The book, priced at £10, is available through Greencoat Place Reception (0207 798 6004).

Saturday 27 November

A DAY OF DISCOVERY

Ranmoor Hall, Sheffield

A day event for all interested in IofC.

For more information please contact: Brian Thirlaway tel. 01978

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