

## Regional Ethics in Leadership Conferences

Bringing together emerging leaders drawn from a broad cross section of business, professional and community groups, from around the wider South East Asian Region and Australia to discuss issues of common concern.

### Aims

The aims of the Regional Ethics Conferences are fairly broad. In essence we hope to:

- > assist the participants in identifying some of the major ethical issues facing the region at the current time
- > facilitate discussion of these issues, including the articulation of different perspectives from around the region
- > provide an environment where these differences can be discussed and explored by the participants in a constructive way
- > foster an awareness of, and sensitivity to, the different value systems and ethical matrices which operate throughout the region
- > encourage the participants to identify and work with the values we all have in common, in order to learn how to accommodate our differences
- > focus on the role of leaders in developing regional awareness and cooperation.

We acknowledge that the process by which these aims are achieved is a long term one.

There have been 13 conferences to date, beginning in 1996. Each conference has brought together leaders and emerging leaders drawn from a broad cross section of business, professional and community groups, from around the wider region and Australia to discuss issues of common concern.

The general purpose of the conference is to look at the role of cultural and social traditions, of economic systems, of political structures and of worldviews that have shaped our identities. Through this exploration we hope to uncover elements that we have or could have in common and also to examine the structures and aspects of societies that hinder the attainment of a common good, both at the national and regional levels.

Our practice has been to develop our conference in collaboration with regional partners. The earliest and more recent conferences were held in Malaysia under the joint auspices of the Centre and ISIS Malaysia through the leadership of the late Tan Sri Dr Noordin Sopiee, followed by Dato' Mohamed Jawhar Hassan. Two conferences were held in Hanoi, Vietnam, convened with Dr Tran Dac Loi, then Director General of the International Youth Cooperation Development Center (CYDECO Vietnam), one in Bangkok with ASEAN ISIS, courtesy of Dr Pranee Thiparat who has been part of our program for the past eleven years.

In 2007 we were invited by Ibu Clara Joewono – an icon within the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) Foundation – to take the Regional Ethics Conference to Indonesia where the conference was held in Bali. Dr Rizal Sukma, Deputy Executive Director of CSIS invited us to return to Indonesia in 2008 and again for 2009.

## A Brief History

The Regional Ethics in Leadership Conferences were originally conceived as part of the Vincent Fairfax Fellowship, a leadership program of St James Ethics Centre, which is based in Australia. The aim of the Fellowship is to encourage good leadership in Australia.

The plan was simple: bring a group of young regional leaders together with the Vincent Fairfax Fellows in the company of experienced senior leaders from around the region to allow an exchange of ideas. However, to be practical, what was needed was a partner who was well known and respected in the region and who was generous enough to lend us their credibility in order to enlist the support of selected regional leaders.

To this end, Dr Simon Longstaff, Executive Director, St James Ethics Centre, enlisted the aid of Dr Anil Seal at Cambridge University. Dr Seal contacted the late Dato' Alexander Yu Lung Lee of Malaysia, who facilitated the introduction to the late Tan Sri Dr Noordin Sopiee, then CEO of the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia. ISIS Malaysia agreed to jointly convene the regional conferences with St James Ethics Centre and remains an important partner in this evolving process.

## Regional Ethics in Leadership Conferences

Summary 1996 - 2008

thirteenth conference: 12-14 March 2008; Bali, Indonesia

### **ON PEACE**

Within the context of a number of the world's great civilisations, it is customary to greet strangers and friends alike – with a blessing of "Peace". Thus is recognised the essential importance of 'peace' to the well-being of humankind. However, what do we know of peace and the conditions under which it may flourish? What is 'peace'?; What are the conditions for peace?; Is peace merely the absence of war?; Is peace worth fighting for?; Is peace possible without prosperity?; Is peace between nations possible without peace between peoples?; Is peace possible only when enforced by a Leviathan?; Is religion a force for peace in the world?; What is the role of multilateral organisations in securing an effective peace?; Does history offer reason to hope for a peaceful future? These questions are as old as the desire for peace itself. Yet, despite centuries of debate, the answers to these questions remain contentious. For example, some people are indifferent to material privation – finding serenity in the spiritual dimension of life. Others believe that there can be no peace without universal justice.

twelfth conference: 22-23 February 2007; Bali, Indonesia

### **ON POWER**

Are all dimensions of power liable to corrupt? Are some persons able to use power free from corruption – or is a truly virtuous life only open to those who renounce power in all of its forms and uses?

Such questions matter for those who would exercise leadership in any capacity. Even the decision to be an autonomous agent, willing to take personal responsibility for one's life, may be seen to involve an exercise of power – the power to be one's self; to assert a sense of one's individuality in relation to community. Some suggest that even the selfless exercise of power, in the political and strategic dimensions of communities and nations, may require compromise of a kind that corrupts a leader's own identity and integrity as a person.

Finally, there are important ethical questions to do with the use of power by state and non-state actors – whether in pursuit of self-interest or in the service of some cause. Should nations deploy their power for noble causes or is this mere folly? To what extent do the ends justify the means? Is active forbearance from the use of power sometimes the better course of action? How do nations decide when, how and if to use the power at their disposal?

eleventh conference: 26-28 April 2006; Port Dickson Malaysia

**CAN WE ESCAPE THE PAST?**

Various attempts are being made to establish viable, international frameworks within which people can prosper. ASEAN has been a successful model that stands along-side the European Union as an example of how the risks associated with historical tensions can be managed for the greater good of all. The builders of such communities usually start with a realistic appeal to the idea of shared interests. However, some embrace a more idealistic goal of moving from shared interests to common values and principles – the deeper foundations required for a community. However, do such foundations exist? If not, are they even possible given the different histories of nations and the possibility that old errors may be revisited? Questions considered during the conference included: What can we know of the past?; What from the past shapes the present – economically; geopolitically; and culturally? And in what ways, if any, do we expect the world of tomorrow to be different from that of today?

tenth conference: 17-20 February 2005; Port Dickson Malaysia

**SIX ASIAs: LOCKED TOGETHER AND FOREVER APART**

The world knows at least six 'asias'. Some may argue that geopolitically, all are bound together in a network of interlocking interests and relationships. But in many other ways the 'six asias' are marked by profound differences. Many questions were posed and discussed during the conference – among them were: Do claims of 'universal' rights have any credibility? What, if any, are the critical differences across the region? Are there significantly different approaches to: making money; arguing versus agreeing, debating versus seeking consensus; speaking out versus keeping mum authority and power; the attitude towards and the role of government

ninth conference: 12-15 February 2004; Port Dickson Malaysia

**THE DANCE OF THE TITANS: RESPONSES TO GREAT POWER**

During this conference we looked at the nature of power and our response to it in the international arena. Our discussions included: - How should we relate to the USA or an emergent power like that of China? In what circumstances (if any) should we stand against the demands of a Great Power? We also explored power at other levels – including the personal, and discussed the question, 'What is the scope (if any) to speak truth to power?'

eighth conference: 13-17 February 2003; Port Dickson Malaysia

**RESPONDING TO TERROR**

Whilst this was a very hot topic, at that time there had been remarkably little sustained debate about the ethical issues arising for leaders in their response to non-state terrorism. At the conference we addressed questions such as: - What constitutes terrorism? How can it be distinguished from other forms of violence? Does the use of violence for political ends distinguish the terrorist from the violent criminal who acts entirely out of self-interest? What are the causes of terrorism? Would a better understanding of the causes allow for a better response to the risk? Can individual countries make a difference – or will coordinated action be required? Are there clear and obvious priorities that might be addressed – what if interests diverge? Are there any justifications for engaging in terrorist activity? Does the legitimacy of the authority of those you might target affect questions of justification? Can terrorism ever be employed as a form of self-defense? How should we respond to terrorism? Is there anything that cannot be changed in order to defend a community from the risk of terrorism? What is the relationship between the values of 'liberty' and 'security'? Are certain political freedoms a 'luxury' only to be afforded in conditions of public safety? Should different standards apply when responding to terrorist threats arising from within our citizen body (as opposed to those from outside)? Are leaders required to 'get their hands dirty' as the price they pay to defend the people they serve? If not, then what are the 'non-negotiables'? What is the role of the media and of public institutions like universities?

seventh conference: 7-12 February 2002; Bangkok Thailand

**IDENTITY: SOURCES THREATS RESPONSES...**

Delegates discussed such questions as: - Who decides my identity? Is it a matter of personal choice or a matter requiring the assent of others or a combination of both? For example, am I Malaysian simply because I choose to be or is this a fact about me that others must agree to? Could I simply choose to nominate myself as, say, a Thai? How would other Thais feel about this? How would other Malaysians feel about this? How do we deal with such issues in practice? Is multiculturalism the answer? Do we need to follow a policy of 'live and let live' in the international arena - respecting the identity of people who may embody a worldview that is fundamentally opposed to my own? Am I restricted from performing any action that might undermine the identity of other people? For example, is the typical 'modern' liberal (western) education a 'bad thing' for people currently living a traditional life?

sixth conference: 8-13 February 2001; Hanoi Vietnam

**HOW CAN WE SHARE THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY – IS THERE A COMMON GOOD?**

This theme was discussed at the conference with a view to learning from each other's national experiences as we move into this new century. We looked at the role of cultural and social traditions, of economic systems, of political structures and of worldviews that have shaped each nation's search for the common good. Through this exploration we hoped to uncover elements that we have or could have in common. We also examined the structures and aspects of societies that hindered the attainment of a common good, both at the national and regional levels. We attempted to address this question in a concrete and practical way, without ignoring the realities of the Asia Pacific Region, and so asked one further core question:

*What is it in the real world that hinders the attainment of the common good?*

For example, what are the effects of corruption, poverty, unequal relationships between nations, the social obligations of business and the digital divide on our ability to achieve the common good - and what might be done about such issues?

fifth conference: 2-7 March 2000; Hanoi Vietnam

**IS THERE A NEW WORLD ORDER?**

This theme was discussed from the political, economic, social and technological points of view, with both national and international perspectives in mind. Visits to General Ho Chi Minh's Mausoleum, the Military Museum, Coca Cola Factory and a local ceramics village helped to ground the discussions. In commenting on the purpose of the conference, Dr Simon Longstaff of The St James Ethics Centre, and Mr Tran Dac Loi, of CYDECO, said, "There is a growing international consensus that the process of globalisation will lose legitimacy and ultimately fail unless the agenda is broadened to include the social and environmental concerns expressed by a growing number of people from all around the world. This changing agenda adds to the degree of complexity faced by leaders. This conference is one of a number of regional measures designed to strengthen our collective capacity to deal with the challenges of an increasingly inter-dependent world."

fourth conference: 10-14 February 1999; Port Dickson, Malaysia

***A VISION OF THE GOOD SOCIETY IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM: how best to balance the interests of the three primary institutions of the state, the market and civil society.***

Dato' Hishamuddin Tun Hussein, Malaysia's Deputy Minister of Primary Industry opened the Conference. His welcome address drew attention to the dangers inherent in perceiving a 'good' society from any one perspective. He spoke of his personal vision for Malaysia and its people. This set the tone for the rest of the Conference and the theme was explored through the practical realities experienced with Food, Work, Information, Identity, and Democracy. Delegates exchanged ideas about the impact of change and future trends. They sought to describe what a good society might look like from the perspective of political, economic and civil communities. Throughout the process workgroups discussed perceptions of the societal institutions, and created representative clay and stick models, which were developed, amended and added to over the five days.

third conference: 4-8 February 1998; Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

***INTERGENERATIONAL EQUITY: duties to past, present and future generations.***

Dato' Seri Anwar, Malaysia's (then) Deputy Prime Minister, gave the opening address at the Welcome Dinner, signifying the Conference's growing importance in the region. The year's theme was explored through panel and workgroup discussions. Dialogue focused on the topics of: Individuals and Communities: Who is Responsible for Whom?; Nations and Politics: Apologies and Persecutions; and Environment: Sacrifices and Savings. Speakers addressed a diverse range of issues such as AIDS, the Khmer Rouge, Scapegoat Politics, and Economic Growth. In the 'wrap up' sessions delegates identified issues of personal interest and reflected on areas of personal duty and responsibility.

second conference: 2-5 January, 1997; Penang, Malaysia

***ETHICS AND GLOBALISATION***

A discussion of the sense and nonsense of the Asian Values debate opened the Conference, followed later in the day by an address from The Honourable Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon, Chief Minister of Penang. The ethical dimensions of globalisation were explored through sessions focusing on Money, Communications, and the Future of the Nation State. A linking of these areas looked at how the advent of such technological advances as the internet could impact the region. Hypothetical role plays, panels of senior leaders and break out groups encouraged frank and open discussion, facilitating an appreciation of the diversity of perspectives and issues involved.

first conference: 3-7 January 1996; Penang, Malaysia

***THE INAUGRAL ETHICS IN LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE***

The Honourable Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon, Chief Minister of Penang, opened the Conference and addressed the delegates at the Welcome Dinner. The focus of this first Conference was on exploring similarities and differences in the region. Windows were opened and many different vistas recognised, with managing cultural differences emerging as a common concern. Discussion centered around the topics of: Cultural Identity, National Identity & Cultural Development; The Environment; Poverty, Economic Development; Managing Cultural Difference; and Critical Social Issues Confronting Societies in Rapid Transition; . Lively discussion raised more questions than were answered, true to the ethical tradition. It was agreed that a humble but honourable start was made, with the process itself proving to be a piece in the 'answer puzzle'.