



Building trust in times of crisis *'Keeping our humanity'*

Thursday 16 April was the first conversation in a series titled 'Trust in times of crisis'. We kicked off with Professor Rajmohan Gandhi, author, journalist and advocate for reconciliation and democratic rights, and grandson of Mahatma Gandhi. Over 180 people from around the world joined the virtual event.

Talia Smith, Trust-building Program manager, reports:

Keeping our humanity

Rajmohan had a strong message. One sentence stayed with me for days: 'Their hunger is greater than my fear.' Rajmohan was quoting someone who, in spite of the risks of infection with Covid-19, takes food and water to homeless people in India, who would otherwise have nothing to eat. People risking their own health, in order to make sure that other people don't suffer: for me this expressed what Rajmohan's talk was all about.

Unity in times of crisis

'The virus has rearranged our kaleidoscopes,' Rajmohan said. 'We can see all of us ranged against the virus, against sickness, against injury, against destruction -- rather than nation against nation, or race against race, or some kind of people against another kind of people.'

Will this new pattern endure? Or will we see a revival of passion for my group, my race, my religious community, my people, my country -- and against the other? This is the time to ask honest questions. Bold questions. We have the incentive to ask, the time to ask.'

In the Q&A round, it became clear that there was one particular question on the minds of most participants: 'How can we as change-makers make sure that we

don't fall back into old patterns?' Rajmohan spoke about his trust in the people attending the event. He said that he believes we will speak out and stand up to our leaders.

A united front beyond

Clearly not an easy task, but an important one. And in order to be able to do so, international networks like Initiatives of Change and programmes like the Trustbuilding Program are so important. They ensure people are connected, exchange knowledge and, above all, establish a basis of trust which transcends differences in race, religion, community and nationality. Now, more than ever, we need to ask ourselves the difficult questions and reach out to the people who need our help.

You can watch this Webinar programme online by clicking on the link below

<https://www.iofc.org/keeping-our-humanity-rajmohan-gandhi>

Living in the Unknown

Many of us worldwide are experiencing living in a state of lockdown in order to prevent the spread of the Covid 19 virus. This brings with it many challenges. Many face hunger, domestic violence, loneliness, frustration, economic uncertainty and in some cases, financial ruin. For some, a great sense of personal peace to just 'be' and use this time to re-evaluate and take stock.

Recently some questions regarding the current social distancing were put to various people by Initiatives of Change (IofC) in Switzerland.

Elsa Vogel (94) lives in the United Kingdom and has worked with IofC for many decades, mainly living in South America. Discover how Covid-19 has changed her daily life and which lessons she has been drawing from this experience.

Here are some excerpts:

What is your current situation? How is the spread of Covid-19 impacting you?

“I am totally isolated in my flat which is located in a building for retired people who are still able to go on living independently.



Now all gatherings have been banned, we have to stay in our own flats. We can go out for food, to the pharmacy and for exercise which I do every morning.”

Describe in 3 words how you are feeling now.

“I was rebellious. Now I am calm and at peace.”

What is your biggest challenge at the moment?

“Not to see my friends and talk with them, especially the ones in the building. We were just beginning to be good friends with some new people who have moved in and to see together how we could help our community to live these days of uncertainty with a great sense of peace - especially to let go feelings that sometimes come between people of different classes and different races.”

What are the lessons you have already learned from this time?

“One important lesson has been to decide not to blame or criticise our government, of which I am not a fan. Now I see that they do have an enormous task to grapple with and they need my support and my care.”

Do you practice quiet times? If so, what is your practice and how does it help you?

“Yes, I do, since I met MRA/IofC in 1945 and it has been like a rock to keep the purpose of my life flowing from my mind and my heart. Also it helps me receive the correction I need so badly. What I do to practice is, first every morning, I keep one hour to meditate. Some part of it is to pray for different friends and some for the countries of the world which are suffering so much.

The rest of the time is to listen to God’s whisper. Some can bring real inspiration, other whispers are to apologize to other people or simple correction.”

What are your best tricks and tips to fight anxiety, uncertainty and loneliness?

“I do not feel anxious or lonely. About uncertainty - I don’t know what to say really. What I have learned during the War (World War II) is that nobody knew when it would end. The important thing we learned was to go on caring and backing the Resistance forces and also go on caring for the Jewish families. As a Girl Guide Leader some of my girls were from Jewish families and suffered very painful times.

And now here, at this moment, we don’t know how long this pandemic will go on. We just need to continue caring for each other in the best way we can.”

How would you like to emerge from this crisis?

“I would like to emerge a totally different person - one who knows what the important things are that I should keep and which I should drop. I also need to become a much more patient person. The main thing I hope to learn is a love and care for people which has nothing to do with duty, and even for some who are difficult to love.”

What are you grateful for?

“I am grateful for a very loving Divine Father who revealed himself to me when I was fifteen at a time when I was very hurt and rebellious about my dysfunctional family. It was a real gift. And I was very grateful to have met MRA/IofC at the age of 19. I learned the philosophy of listening to the inner voice in your heart and took seriously, with difficulty at times, the challenge of absolute moral standards as a guide.”

We continue on the subject of Lockdown and give reflections written by three South Africans.



Nombulelo Khanyile, mother, grandmother, an MBA graduate in Tourism, and an Elder within the international body of IofC.

“I find myself in a pensive mood during this lockdown time – at peace with myself and full of joy. I am grateful for the gift of family and for many friendships going back to my university days. This I treasure. As a mother I have found myself nurturing and mentoring many young people.

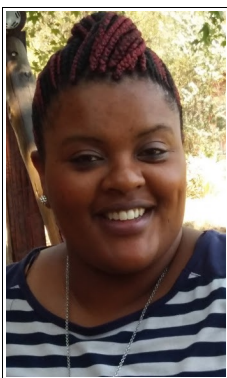
This time of isolation has given me time to pause, and try and get clarity on how I continue to live my life

going forward. I am learning that abundance does not only refer to money or material wealth. It encompasses many things like satisfaction, joy, optimism and confidence, and living a life that can impact people in a significant way. I am learning that the best way to live life is to be, and do your best every day, because you do not know what tomorrow may bring. I am learning to appreciate the abundance that surrounds me, the beauty of our blue sky, the sun, air, water, plants, birds, and the energy I get from all these.

I am learning to embrace the truth of the parable "This too shall pass." When I think of the parable, my mind takes me to the changing circumstances one encounters in life. It connects me with experiences I have had, some good, amazing, unbelievably great, while others are excruciatingly painful and heart-breaking. The important thing for me has always been to remember that nothing remains the same forever. Life gives you moments where you are happy and feeling good and on top of the world. You are energised and feel you can conquer anything, and this is essential in life. The difficult times are also necessary, as they offer lessons and personal growth and development.

What I have learnt is that in both these types of experiences, the good and painful, is to rely on the still small voice that speaks in every heart, to guide me and give me direction on what to do.

I would love to emerge from this crisis as a stronger and more informed person, and, as Deepak Chopra reminds us, 'to celebrate and respect my unity with all life knowing that we are all one'."



Cleopadia Mohlaodi, National Co-Ordinator for IofC South Africa, and Webmaster for IofC Africa, writes about her experience during lockdown.

"My current situation is working from home, being a daughter and nurse to my mother, a friend to many through social media/ praying for each other, and a community carer. The impact of Covid-19, has been emotional,

full of fear, anxiety and stress while changing certain lifestyles I am used to. For example, having lost close relatives and not being able to take part in their burial or celebrate together our birthdays and the normal day of work. However, I am grateful for health, family, work and to be home.

With the lockdown come a number of challenges -

restricted movement, even to go to the salon and have hair braided. I get fearful when going out for essential shopping, despite protecting myself and being extra cautious. I find myself paranoid with the hygiene factor of the goods I am buying. The biggest challenge is keeping healthy, especially my mother's ailing health and her frequent relapses that force us to take trips to the doctor, hospital and pharmacies while keeping safe.

The lessons I am learning from this time are that life is unpredictable. Adaptation and trust is key to dealing with change. Relationships matter - to give support and help a person grow. However I have learned the importance of choosing the right people to be in my close circle. As the world develops and we become more digitalised, we inherit a lot of complexity. I am learning to live simply.

Practising quiet times are a lifestyle and are the core of my sanity. I sing a lot, do a lot of journaling and mindful colouring. This helps elevate my spirit when I feel low and gives me hope and creativity for looking ahead.

Tricks I advocate most for fighting anxiety, uncertainty and loneliness is home exercise, limiting news/ social media intake, listening to lots of motivational talks, praying, embracing emotions as they show up, journaling or reading. For me I try to do something exciting daily, like, watching a movie, gardening, wearing a favourite outfit, putting make up on and enjoying the sun for a while. Lastly be grateful for everything small or large.

Despite social distancing requirements we need to continue connecting with each other. We can use digital platforms of communication updates, like on WhatsApp. Empathy is the greatest connector - where we can do random acts of kindness to those around us by sharing what the others don't have especially essentials like food, sanitizers, blankets, clothes and prayers.

I was recently involved in supporting a nearby NGO #Icare drive that gave safety training to volunteers and then we distributed essentials to families in need. We were each asked to identify five families and give what we can. Between our donations and that of the NGO, a lot was raised. I chose to give the food parcels to homes occupied by the elderly. The one family, where a granny with her 3 teenage orphan grandchildren lived, had nothing. The thanks they gave were tears of gratitude."

Rudiger Lütz, Lutheran Pastor in Vryheid, Kwa Zulu-Natal writes:

"Being a pastor in South Africa I have never experienced that I had to cancel Divine Services for

so many consecutive weeks. I have never lived in such a worldwide crisis.

My feelings are mixed: sadness and bereavement that so many people suffer because of sickness and death as well as economic hardship on the one side,



thankfulness on the other side that we can stay at such a comfortable house from the church, that services in Vryheid function well and that we are healthy. I am very grateful that I am married to my wife Silke with a strong Christian faith and

good personality, who also enjoys knitting and craft work very much.

The lesson that I have learned is that fear of the unknown arises within me even though I should not be afraid because I know that we are surrounded by God's love and care. The other lesson is to appreciate things that I had taken for granted and that we come closer in our marriage.

I practise quiet time by listening to Trans World Radio's German programme from 6 to 6.30 in the morning, by praying and reading some chapters from the Bible every day and having devotions with my wife.

We connect through regular phone calls, e-mails and Zoom Meetings with the congregations, colleagues, family and friends.

A tip for fighting anxiety is to limit watching news and rather watch good videos, about nature, events in history or other countries as well as listening to music and doing what one can do at home like learning a foreign language or reading good books.

I think this virus is God's reaction to make mankind turn away from materialism and specially to stop the destruction of the environment. We have to be very creative to find new ways for the future and be content with less. We will definitely become poorer in material things but more mature in our faith and the development of our personality."

Positive Peace brings Positive Change - Creators of Peace in Diepkloof, Soweto

The energy to overcome challenges was the vibe of the group that met from 17th-19th March 2020, at the Diepkloof Welfare Centre, Soweto. This took place despite the fear building up regarding the increasing

news of the existence of Covid-19 in South Africa.

Diepkloof is a township located southwest of Johannesburg, formerly known as "Meadowdeep," one of the founding residential areas in Soweto. Diepkloof is one of the active communities that welcomed and continuously supports the Creators of Peace inner healing work. The four-year Diepkloof collaboration include the partners such as the Municipality of Johannesburg, NGO's involved with youth, the elderly and churches.



Creators of Peace Circles opened a space for conversation to a group of 25 participants (six men and eighteen women) between the ages of 25-40 years. Their expectations were to deal with anger, explore 'who am I?', understand peace and forgiveness, improve communication and learn conflict resolution methods. The participants volunteer as caregivers and youth education practitioners in NGO's named Tlhokomelo Healthcare & Treatment Centre and Barona Children's Healthcare Centre. The vision of these NGOs' is to cater for the social needs of the community offering counselling and places of care. They also offer basic skills development, early childhood development and promote healthy living on issues, e.g. HIV/AIDS for affected persons, orphans and elderly citizens.



An interesting discussion developed around the theme, 'What is Peace anyway?' We looked at the difference between positive and negative peace, sharing from personal experience. Most participants realised that they are living more on negative peace.

Decisions were made to make the change. Naledi, a participant said, "I realize that the peace that I'm working so hard to build with my mother is a negative one. I always do things to make her happy and for the sake of us not fighting. Now I know that I need to work hard on positive peace, so I can give her the peace I have inside." Sibusiso expressed that "from here, I am going to call my father and ask him for forgiveness for my bad behaviour and my hate towards him."

To get to the peace they desire, the participants have taken practical steps, such as asking to be referred for counselling to overcome anger, going to ask forgiveness from family members and those they hurt through expressing their emotions to make the other aware how they feel. The best apology is a changed behaviour.

iListen Initiative

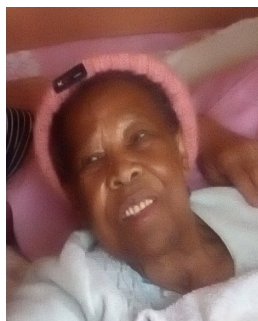
The IofC International Council has been running daily **iListen** online sessions via Zoom, providing the global IofC fellowship with a chance for times of quiet and sharing. Initiated by Suresh Vazirani, iListen has helped IofC friends from across the world to support each other in these unprecedented times of crisis. There are two sessions each day, so that people in every time-zone can take part. Each session is facilitated by friends within the fellowship.

So far about 600 participants from 50 or more countries, have participated, freely expressing their thoughts, pain and difficulties as well as joy, strength, courage and love. Many have written in warm appreciation of the sessions and of connecting with others through them.

Those who ask to keep in touch are invited to subscribe to IofC xChange and sign up for IofC communications. A page has been set up at <https://xchange.iofc.org/virtual-quiet-time>, where participants can share reflections if they wish to do so.

In Memory

Lindiwe (Lindi) Miyeza, , passionate peacemaker, fearless fighter for justice and carer of the marginalised and those in need, passed away peacefully on 13th April. She was born on 7th March, 1935 in Sophiatown, Johannesburg.



Lindi was a committed Christian and a member of the Methodist Church. Asked what it was like to be a woman of faith in Soweto during the turmoil of the 1960s and 1970s she answered: "To be a Christian woman in Soweto was to be able to be what you are. It was ultimately fulfilling. The women were the ones who brought the things into the community that made them to survive: values, and strength. The values we brought into Soweto were loving, caring, understanding, chinning up, respecting, empathizing, making things look normal. Yes, all these values are verbs. And we made people strong by showing through our own lives the strength of faith. If we are not strong, the community will collapse. And we were strong through our faith."

During the times of turmoil, she organised prayer meetings and Bible studies for the women 'to keep their faith alive and practical' as she put it. In 1979 she founded Pulpit Women, bringing together lay and ordained women whose preaching voices were not recognised in the community.

After her involvement with students during the unrest of the 70s, Lindi organised medical and other help during the 1976 uprising. She took a great risk personally, during that time, using her home to help students find shelter from the security police.

From 1976 onwards, she ran inner city programmes for women at the Central Methodist Church in Johannesburg. During that time Lindi, together with Motlalepula Chabaku, got involved with Moral Re-Armament (now Initiatives of Change), using films and discussions to give a perspective of how personal change can lead to national change.

For three years in the early 80s, Lindi was Director of the Wilgespruit Fellowship Centre, an ecumenical training centre for the unemployed and illiterate, and a haven against the injustices of Apartheid.

In April 2006, Lindi was conferred with the Baobab Award for "her contribution to the economy and the upliftment of women and under-privileged communities in South Africa," by the then President Thabo Mbeki. Seven years later, on 8th October 2013, she was given an honorary Masters degree in Education by the University of South Africa.

Anthony and Helen Duigan, Meryl Horn and excerpts taken from a paper written about Ma Lindi by Christina Landman of the Research Institute for Theology and Religion, University of South Africa, Pretoria

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