



The Hard Science of Peace

An Interview with Kevin Clements, Director of Australian Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies

He discusses with SangSaeng the fine points of conflict resolution and the work his centre does towards that elusive end.

SangSaeng: Congratulations on opening the Australian Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (ACPACS) last March. Could you introduce ACPACS to our readers, discuss its main goals and your role in the Centre as director?

Kevin Clements: ACPACS is a centre of research and practice excellence in the areas of conflict analysis, prevention and management, alternative dispute resolution, peace-building, development and post-conflict reconstruction. ACPACS is located within the Faculty of Social Behavioural Sciences at The University of Queensland. The functions of the Centre are: to conduct research into the causes of international and national conflict as well as those related to international security, non-violent modes of conflict resolution and sustainable peace-building with special reference to the Asia-Pacific region; to deliver

high quality postgraduate programmes and provide knowledge and practical skills in non-violence, mediation, conflict resolution, peace-keeping and peace-building in the contemporary global context; and to provide advanced-level short courses and training for government and non-government organizations engaged in peace-keeping, peace-building, development and activities, humanitarian intervention, and work in conflict contexts. My role as Director of the Centre is to provide strategic direction, develop strategic partnerships; develop research and practice foci; I also represent the Centre within the University and to the outside world.

SangSaeng: Please tell us about your previous experiences as an expert in Peace and Conflict Studies and your achievements in various organizations

and centres such as International Alert.

Kevin Clements: I have been working on peace and conflict issues for the past twenty years in different places, including New Zealand, Australia, Switzerland, the USA and throughout Asia. In all my work I have tried to understand and work to remove the root causes of violence at all levels. This means solid analyses of the structural, cultural, and situational sources of violence and the design of appropriate intervention strategies for dealing with that violence. Through my work experiences, I have become more and more convinced of the importance of egalitarian and emancipatory partnerships as well as the development of relationships, whereby one can “accompany” those in conflict as they devise the solutions for dealing with their own conflicts.

At International Alert (an interna-

tional NGO), I was very pleased to be working in an organization that had articulated an Ethical and Professional Code of Conduct to guide such work, as well as working with progressive elements of the Private and Development Sectors as they became more conflict sensitive. While there and here, at the University of Queensland, I have focused recent attention on what is now known as the Development-Peacebuilding Nexus which is aimed at developing a rigorous methodology for achieving human security - freedom from want and freedom from fear. As an academic it was also important for me to work within International Alert. The experience of actually working with parties in intense war zones is very humbling for academics, since our theoretical understanding of conflict is often quite inadequate for the practical understanding necessary to add anything of real importance to people who are struggling to survive in very adverse circumstances.

SangSaeng: We see that you have participated as a consultant in various cases of resolving and mediating conflicts and disputes. Can you tell us about one specific case that was especially memorable or impressive?

Kevin Clements: Most conflicts are never finally resolved. On the contrary, they are managed or transformed so that the individual parties can begin discerning new ways in which they can work together or rebuild connections between themselves. In that regard, I think work that the International Alert and other NGOs did in Burundi was important. We did not try and resolve the many conflicts between Hutu/Tutsi, but instead tried to generate safe spaces within which individual leaders from both sides could begin to address their problems and also begin that much more difficult task of changing attitudes and re-humanizing their views of the other. We worked alongside Burundians as they grappled with issues of justice, development, security sector reform and the role of women in the maintenance of peace and security.

One of the most useful pieces of work, however, was an analysis of the situation facing political prisoners post-genocide. We did an analysis of the numbers of people awaiting trial in prison and discovered that there were 11,000 people in prisons that were designed for 3,000. The justice system was effectively ruined

by the genocide, and prisoners were not being brought to trial.

Our analysis, therefore, recommended that all of the charges against these prisoners should be subject to external scrutiny to see whether there was a case to answer. We discovered that many of the charges were completely without foundation and could never be proven in a court of law. This report and the follow-up by Swedish Jurists recommended the immediate release of around 4,000 prisoners. These people were subsequently released and reintegrated into their communities. This is an act of very concrete peace-building. Since then the Burundian government has sought to reactivate their whole penal and judicial system. In doing so, they are working to create a new respect for the rule of law that is always a pre-requisite for building a stable peace.

SangSaeng: Please tell us about the conference hosted by ACPACS from 1st to 3rd of April on the theme of "Peace, Justice and Reconciliation in the Asia-Pacific Region."

Kevin Clements: ACPACS was officially launched by the Governor of Queensland, Ms Quentin Bryce, at a ceremony on March 31st. ACPACS is the only Centre in Australia to bring together peace and conflict studies,

provided the keynote address on "Challenges to Peace in the Pacific" immediately following the launch formalities, with the rest of the conference continuing over the following three days at the Bardon Centre.

Some of the conference highlights included: International political economist Richard Friman from Marquette University, who discussed how globalisation fuels both legitimate and illegitimate business; Australian Federal Police Commissioner Mick Keelty, who spoke on challenges to peace and justice in the region and the role of the AFP in peacekeeping and maintaining law and order; Honourable Justice Sir Albert Palmer, Chief Justice of the High Court of the Solomon Islands, who spoke on customary versus introduced law in the settlement of land disputes within the Pacific; A session on the flows of small arms and light weapons in the Asia Pacific region, which examined gun running in Papua New Guinea and small arms weapons collections in the Solomon Islands and Cambodia; A Solomon Island's critique of the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) and a response from the current Special Coordinator James Bately.

There was also a major session on post-conflict reconciliation in the Asia Pacific region with a major focus on post-Suharto Indonesia and peace build-

Peace also has both internal and external qualities.

It is not possible for individuals to generate peaceful relationships between themselves if they are at war within themselves and have not achieved a measure of internal integration and wholeness.

international politics and development, alternative dispute resolution, and mediation and law. The creation of the Centre was enabled by a two million dollar donation by the Venerable Master Chin Kung, the spiritual leader of the Amitabha Buddhist Association. The launch was a precursor to the international conference "Peace, Justice and Reconciliation in the Asia-Pacific Region", hosted by ACPACS from the 1-3 April 2005. Around 250 delegates were in attendance from as far afield as Iran, and most Asia Pacific countries were represented. Mr Greg Urwin, Secretary-General of the Pacific Islands Forum,

ing in Timor and Vanuatu. It was also announced there that the Centre will partner with the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) and the National Council of Chiefs of Vanuatu (the Malvatumauro) to strengthen the role of traditional leaders in the development process. This is an exciting collaboration that offers a great opportunity for the Malvatumauro Council of Chiefs and The University of Queensland to learn from each other, and especially for the University to support the chiefs in enhancing their strengths and capacities. It is a partnership that seeks to draw on both tradi-

tional and modern perspectives and a development project based on mutual respect. We see this as another example of ACPACS putting research to practical use, and, at the same time, drawing important research value from applied projects. The Chiefs identified the need for capacity building so they could better define their roles in relation to formal government, enhance their participation in the development process, and manage the rapid social changes taking place within their communities.

SangSaeng: With its excellence in the field of Peace and Conflict Studies, how is ACPACS cooperating and interacting with the other peace organizations of the Asia Pacific region?

Kevin Clements: ACPACS is quietly developing strategic partnerships with a range of theory, research and practice institutions within the Asia Pacific region and further afield. We are certainly happy to develop a close working relationship with APCEIU. We have a strong and growing relationship with the UNU and the University of the South Pacific along with a wide range of Australian universities and universities within East and Southeast Asia. We are partners with the Department of Peace Studies at the University of Uppsala as well as many organizations, such as the European Centre for Conflict Prevention in Utrecht, International Alert, Search for Common Ground and Conciliation Resources.

SangSaeng: How would you define "peace"? We all know that the world should make efforts to achieve peace, but what exactly does the term "peace" indicate?

Kevin Clements: I define peace in both negative and positive terms. That is, peace is both an absence of war and also a situation in which the great majority of the people can expect that their needs for recognition, welfare, and security are met most of the time. Peace is not a finally achieved state, however, it is a process, an essential quality of cooperative and harmonious relationships. Peace also has both internal and external qualities. It is not possible for individuals to generate peaceful relationships between themselves if they are at war *within* themselves and have not achieved a measure of internal integration and wholeness.

SangSaeng: What are some ways to build sustainable peace, especially in the Asia-Pacific region?

Kevin Clements: We need a much higher commitment to conceptualizing peaceful possibilities in the Asia-Pacific region. It is important that we understand the social, political and economic dynamics that both fuel conflict and also those that fuel peace. In particular, it is important that all governments and regional organizations utilize economic and political power to build connections between peoples rather than competition and division. Also, there needs to be more acknowledgement of the fact that stable peaceful relationships cannot be delivered by state systems alone. It is imperative that state commitment to peace be matched by an equally strong civil society (NGO) and their commitment to peace. Sustainable peace requires top down and bottom up measures meeting each other in mutually reinforcing processes that encourage virtuous cycles instead of vicious ones. In particular, we need to pay much more attention to identifying and supporting peaceful processes and opposing the less peaceful ones.

SangSaeng: We see that one of the main functions of ACPACS is to provide courses and training for governmental and non-governmental organizations engaged in peace-keeping and peace-building. What do you think peace education should aim for?

Kevin Clements: Peace Education is absolutely critical to the achievement of sustainable peace. It is absolutely true, as UNESCO asserts, that violence and war begin in the minds of individual men and women. Thus it is vital that educators promote peaceful attitudes and behavior and create pedagogic conditions within which individuals might see peaceful behavior modeled for them by their teachers. Successful peace education, therefore, will flourish in peaceful learning environments at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. It is not just a question of teaching peace, therefore, but of *living* peace in our research, our education and in our advocacy for a more peaceful world.

SangSaeng: Do you have any advice for our peace educators? What should they keep in mind, and how can they help promote peace in the Asia-Pacific region?

Kevin Clements: Peace education is a vocation that is under threat at the moment. Too much of our everyday language and practice is militarized. There is a resurgence of nationalist sentiment and hard concepts of national sovereignty. The war on terror is generating many of the pathologies it is supposed to be preventing. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, along with the 31 conflicts in the world, are generating more chaos than order. Amidst all this peace education and peace research clamor to make themselves heard. They are seen by the media, for example, as "soft", "unrealistic," naïve and utopian options — and therefore not worthy of consideration. Yet, this is precisely the moment at which they are of most importance. That is why we need to mainstream peace education, peer mediation, conflict resolution and peaceful ways of settling disputes within government organizations, schools, universities, the business sector, health institutions, churches, temples and mosques. In fact, we need peace education wherever individuals are seeking to generate peaceful environments.

SangSaeng: Any advice to the young generation of the Asia-Pacific region on what they could do to help sustain peace and prevent disputes?

Kevin Clements: It is vital that the current generation begins to assume responsibility for carving out a peaceful tomorrow. As Martin Luther King said, "War is a very bad chisel" for such an operation. It is vital, therefore, that young people assume responsibility for the peaceful and creative prevention of conflict and the pursuit and achievement of economic and social justice. The challenge is how to persuade youth of the benefits of such an enterprise. This is not just a question of moralizing about peace and war but working to ensure that the younger generation understands the costs and benefits of war as well as what their responsibilities are in relation to the hard choices associated with it. In particular, it is important that children and young people spend as much time on peacework as they do on video games, entertainment and all that passes for leisure these days. This means making the building of sustainable peace both fun and important. If we do not elicit this commitment to peace from young people, the vacuum will be filled by those who articulate darker purposes.