

VISIT OF DR OMNIA MARZOUK, PRESIDENT OF INITIATIVES OF CHANGE INTERNATIONAL TO MALAYSIA

26th - 30th June 2014

Dr Omnia Marzouk, President of Initiatives of Change International (IofC) made a four day visit to Malaysia en route home from Japan. She arrived on Thursday 26th June to be received by Mr K. Haridas, Chair of IofC Malaysia

MEETING WITH OPPOSITION LEADER IN THE MALAYSIAN PARLIAMENT

Early the next morning a meeting was arranged with Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim, Leader of the Opposition in the Malaysian Parliament. He received us warmly and discussions ranged from current inter-faith issues in Malaysia, issues in the Middle East and in particular Egypt as well as the work of IofC. He also inquired after former IofC President Shri Rajmohan Gandhi during the hour spent with him.



INTERFAITH SPIRITUAL FELLOWSHIP (INSAF)

The rest of the day was spent catching up with news, preparing for the 'KL Lecture 2014', and a visit to Kuala Lumpur 'Sights by night'. The following morning Dr. Omnia Marzouk was received by Mother Mangalam at the Inter-faith Spiritual Fellowship (Insaf). Dr. Amir Farid Chair of Insaf outlined the activities of Insaf at the Board Room Meeting attended by several members of the Insaf Executive. Dr. Omnia shared a presentation on IofC and this was followed by an exchange of ideas. Dr. Amir Farid then introduced Dr. Omnia Marzouk to the work of United Religions Initiative (URI) and connected her with Dr. Kiran Bali, the Chair of URI in the UK. IofC Malaysia remains an active member of Insaf with the Chair of IofC Malaysia being the Vice Chairman of Insaf. Thereafter we were hosted to a vegetarian lunch.



MEETING WITH IOFC TEAM

Following lunch a meeting was held at the 'UEM Leadership Training Centre', the venue of the 'KL Lecture 2014' with about 30 active members of IOFC Malaysia. This was a prelude to the KL Lecture. They heard from Dr. Omnia Marzouk and thereafter had a vibrant question and answer session. Later that afternoon at 3.30pm we began to welcome the public and friends to the KL Lecture.



THE KL LECTURE 2014

About eighty attended the 'KL Lecture 2014' on the theme 'Sustainable Engagement: Beyond Medicine Towards Healing Our Common Humanity'. Following Dr. Omnia's address, two other Doctors, Dr. Mary Cardoza and Dr. Amir Farid responded to her speech. Chaired by Mr K. Haridas, he welcomed everyone and said what a joy it was to have three doctors address this theme, all three with outstanding educational achievements, distinguished practitioners, and specialists in their own right. He stressed that what was special about them was their involvement with causes and issues beyond their professional careers. All three showed deep concern for the needs of society. They are all individuals with sustainable engagements that are compassionate in essence.



Dr Omnia Marzouk

In her address Dr. Omnia shared her life journey having been born in Spain, schooled in Egypt, and then onto Australia where her father was the Egyptian Ambassador. “I did my medical training in Australia, then specialised in paediatric emergency medicine. For the last 30 years my home has been Liverpool – the city of the Beatles and football – where I work in a children’s hospital with one of the largest and busiest children’s emergency department in Western Europe”.



She spoke of meeting IofC at the age of 15 when she attended a youth camp. “I was the only Muslim in an intergenerational group of Christians. I was struck by the quality of life of the people I met, who combined a real interest in the world with a deep personal care for people. They also combined big thinking with a practical application of change in their communities and workplace. I wanted to know more about their approach.”

“Initiatives of Change is a worldwide movement of people of diverse cultures, backgrounds, and religious traditions, who are committed to transformation of society through a change in human motives and behaviour starting with themselves. Personal transformation starts by an honest look at one’s own motives and behaviour, applying moral standards we wish to see in our society in our own personal life and seeking inner wisdom to guide our steps. Being a true scientist, even at the age of 15, I decided to embark on this experiment and try it for myself.”

“As I reflected in quiet on my own life against the four absolute standards of honesty, purity, unselfishness, and love, I was surprised by two thoughts: I was jealous and dishonest. I was jealous of my older brother who was an extrovert, fun loving person.”

“I was angry about corruption and dishonesty in the world yet I took change from my father’s dressing table without asking his permission. I realised that if I wanted a world free of corruption and dishonesty then I needed to apply this to my own life first. I apologised to my brother and was honest with my father. I felt a real freedom as a result so I decided to continue this experiment: having daily times of quiet reflection and continuing to look at narrowing the gap between the important moral values I aspire to and their daily application in my own life.”

“From that point the real application of my faith was the central core of my life. But I wanted it to also underpin my working life and its ethics, the way I interact with people. I also wanted to find a wider role as a change-maker in my wider community. As I prayed and reflected on what my specific vocation and calling was – I felt I had two callings. One was to children and their health and wellbeing through my work as a paediatrician. The other calling was to build bridges of trust and understanding between people of different cultures and religions.”

“My life has been greatly enriched by my encounters with people of other backgrounds and traditions. Who I am today has been also shaped by what I have learnt from others who are different to me. While I continue to be proud of my culture and heritage as an Arab, British, Muslim woman and passionate about the needs of my community, I have learnt to be as passionate about the needs of others and as pained by their suffering. My view of the world has expanded and changed into a more holistic view of not just ‘us’ and ‘them’. She then outlined the three key focus areas of IofC’s activities:

1. Trust building

2. Ethical leadership
3. Sustainable living

She stressed that building a lasting democratic society and sustainable living conditions requires more than Institutions. The need for individuals who embody in their own lives the daily work of integrity and healing was critical.

“Without trust we cannot build anything lasting in our societies. Without ethical leaders and integrity in economy our societies will not flourish and develop. Without a change in attitude and behaviour we will not sustain the planet for future generations. Without learning from the past and healing historical legacies we can’t be free and whole to create a new future. None of this will happen unless everyone plays a part. We have to remember that everyone is needed and that ordinary people can do extraordinary things if they are willing to listen to their inner voice, live lives of compassion, integrity and moral values. Together, if we adopt a more holistic view of our common humanity, we can make a difference in our communities. That is the great hope for the future of our countries and the world,” she stressed.

Dr Amir Farid

In responding to Dr. Omnia Marzouk’s address, Dr. Amir Farid spoke of the increasing disharmony amongst races in Malaysia highlighting at the same time the challenges of corruption, cronyism, and wastages within the government system.

“As an interfaith leader, I notice that the Muslims are only keen to participate in interfaith programmes, especially if there is opportunity to proselytize, but not be part of a formal interfaith organisation. They are very eager to engage in interfaith dialogues/debates, but are not so keen to participate in programmes to promote fellowship and harmonious living.”

“As a spiritual teacher, I experience our common spirituality, although our religions set barriers between us. If religions tend to divide us, spirituality can unite us. It appears that the religions have failed to thwart the progressive moral decay we have witnessed happening over the last generation. Hopefully, we can reverse this trend by infusing the wise and beautiful teachings found in the spiritual traditions into our society.”

“We can achieve peace and harmony, and progress and succeed together as a nation despite our different races, cultures and religions if we practice the “Absolute Standards of Life” and also the “Key Focus Areas” of IofC, as mentioned by Dr. Omnia Marzouk.”

“These standards are – Honesty, Purity, Unselfishness and Love. To these can be added Respect and Friendship, and many more. These are core spiritual values that would make it easy to live in peace and harmony with one another despite the many differences that are bound to happen in any plural society.”

“The Key Focus Areas – Trust, Ethical Leadership and Sustainable Living – are precisely what we need here to bring us out of our current imbroglio. Trust is severely lacking between the different racial and religious groups. Ethical leadership must be present at all levels of society, but most importantly at the government level. Sustainable Living initiatives need to be urgently implemented if we want



to avoid dire consequences. We are already seeing the impact of our neglect through the polluted environment, frequent haze and water shortages,” echoed Dr. Amir Farid.

Dr Mary Cardoza

Dr. Mary Cardoza in her response indicated that she was out of her comfort zone in responding to issues of trust and change. The first women President of the Malaysian Medical Association, she also served as the President of the All Women’s Action Society, Malaysia (AWAM) an organisation committed to improving the lives of women in Malaysia.



“As health professionals she stressed that our goal was to make sick people better and with the training and alignment to the Hippocratic Oath one would think that health professionals are more equipped to dispense care in a non-discriminating way irrespective of colour, class, gender or race.

By experience she felt that this should also extend to their lives beyond their profession. This however is not always the case. She cited ‘Individualism’ and “I centrisim” as challenges. She agreed that there is a need to bring it down to the level of the individual as stressed by Dr. Omnia Marzouk.

She questioned “What is it that makes people want to be different?’. Health care professionals are often well endowed. They work hard and earn well and because of this they enjoy comforts. It may be more difficult for them to want to change.”

She talked about the government’s effort to introduce “1care”, which provides access to both private and government facilities in the context of health care. She noted, while it was good from a patient’s perspective, some doctors/specialists felt threatened by what they might lose. Hence this was not accepted. ‘What is in it for me?’ remains a key issue. Does the environment encourage change? There seem to be more barriers to change. Embracing the other is an important idea and this requires trust. In addition friendship and respect are equally important and we should move from shared commonalities in sustaining change.

At the end of an hour the audience had a chance to ask interesting questions following which mementoes were given to the speakers. The occasion ended with the song “Be the change you want to see in the world”.

INTER FAITH MEETING

The following day on Sunday we were invited to the home of Sharifah Zuriah Al Jaffri, a respected artist and activist. She had invited about thirty people of different faiths to an interfaith meeting with Dr. Omnia Marzouk. Following an address by Dr. Omnia, a lively discussion chaired by Ms. Yuet Mee Ho-Nambiar followed the occasion. Ms.Yuet Mee Ho-Nambiar shared her reflections of the meeting that “It was indeed a lovely morning yesterday at Kak Zu's beautiful residence - starting the Holy month of Ramadhan with such meaningful conversation among old friends and new from diverse backgrounds, all passionate concerned citizens.

Dr Omnia was of course most inspiring. She generously shared her experiences and insights which elicited much reflection and sharing on our part too. Dr Omnia's prescription for building trust and friendships across faiths and cultures is simple yet powerful - that all of us must consciously reach

out to connect with those who are different from us, and the importance of doing things together so that we better appreciate and understand each other's worldview, so as to transcend our differences and instead celebrate our diversity.

Her comments about the importance of daily reflection, in addition to our daily moments of reverence, resonated with many of us too. We reflected on the essential bonds of friendships - including with friends in our neighbourhood - and the universal standards for individual and collective behaviour such as truthfulness, love, and compassion. That the process of change must start within ourselves, that we must endeavour to reduce the credibility gap in our daily life, and that it is not just about doing less bad but it is about doing more good.

What particularly struck a chord with me personally was the story narrated by Dr Omnia about someone who decided that all his projects are those that give hope - which brings to mind, this wonderful quote by Martin Luther - "Everything that is done in this world is done by hope." Let's stay in touch and encourage each other with our stories of hope and love in our endeavour to be the change we want to see in the world."





VISIT WITH FRIENDS AND RADIO INTERVIEW

Later on Sunday afternoon Dr. Omnia Marzouk met with several members of the IofC Board in Malaysia, exchanging ideas on current issues and challenges. Thereafter, she met with her friend of many years, Ms. Julie Tan.

On Monday morning Dr. Omnia Marzouk was at the office of BFM 89.9, a popular radio station. A forty minute radio interview covered not only her life's journey but also her conviction for IofC and the world today. After a busy four days, Dr. Omnia Marzouk left early on Tuesday 1st July 2014 for London and she was seen off by Tia Nair.



Link to Interview:

<http://www.bfm.my/initiative-of-change-dr-omnia-marzouk.html>