“Blow the vuvuzela against xenophobia!”

BY JO-ANNE SMETHERHAM

In the informal settlement of Philippi, in Cape Town, a group of young men storm into a Somalian’s spaza shop and start beating him up. Some locals hear his cries, grab their vuvuzelas and start marching to the shop. A small crowd joins them and the sound of the vuvus grows until the local police hear. The attackers flee.

This is how xenophobic violence could be prevented across Cape Town soon, when the IHOM and 14 other organisations launch an innovative anti-xenophobia campaign called “Blow the vuvuzela against xenophobia.” The campaign was first suggested at a community conversation instigated and facilitated by the IHOM with its partner Africa Unite.

HRH Maria Teresa Grand Duchess of Luxembourg has accepted the invitation to become a Patron of the Institute

Audience at Luxembourg’s Grand-Ducal Palace, 23 April 2010: (left to right) Victor Cervati, Fr Michael’s assistant; Patrick Byrne, Hon. President of FIACAT (ACAT* International Federation); Fr Michael Lapsley, IHOM Director; HRH Grand-Duchess Maria Teresa of Luxembourg; Cecile Thill, Chair of ACAT-Luxembourg; Monique Ruppert, Vice-Chair of ACAT-Luxembourg.

* Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture
This community conversation was held at Beautiful Gate in Philippi on June 24, to workshop the question of “how we can live together as Africans and celebrate our diversity,” said Alphonse Niyodusenga of the IHOM, who came up with the idea for the event together with Mongezi Mngese. It followed a host of media reports predicted that xenophobic attacks would flare up again after the World Cup. Subsequently, there have been reports of some such attacks.

The Department of Social Development is backing the campaign, having attended the planning sessions. The community conversation aimed to help prevent a repeat of the horrors of the May 2008 xenophobic attacks, which shocked South Africa and the world. The meeting was attended by 40 people, including ward councillors, street committee representatives, three police representatives, leaders of the migrant community and delegates from organisations including Safer Schools and the Holocaust Centre.

The delegates at the event suggested that other organisations be brought on board, and that they launch the anti-xenophobia campaign together. “It came up, in the meeting, that the migrants had all supported Bafana Bafana, and that we had all blown our vuvuzelas for Ghana when they played France,” said Alphonse. “The World Cup was a unifying force. We could now all blow our vuvuzelas against xenophobia, to say we’re all Africans and we want to live together peacefully as people from different parts of Africa.”

Former ward councillor Boyisile Mafilika pointed out the root of the problem at the meeting. Traumatised migrants come to places in South Africa where “people are also traumatised by unemployment, poverty, lack of services,” he said. In addition, criminals were taking advantage of the migrants’ vulnerability.

South African Vukozola Bikwana described the dilemma facing many South African women. “I’m fighting xenophobia because many of us have boyfriends and husbands from other parts of Africa, and children with them,” she said. “We have to protect these husbands and children. This xenophobia is very painful for women.”

The delegates made several recommendations. One was that a joint statement be drawn up and issued to the media. In addition, South Africans and migrants should invite one another to their cultural celebrations, to learn more about one another. They should also discuss their problems, so that South Africans could realise their fellow Africans “are here because of what their countries are going through, not just because they’re economic migrants,” the delegates said.

Local leaders and councillors should mobilise their communities to raise awareness about xenophobia; police should be visible in the townships after the end of the World Cup, and human rights education and healing of memories workshops, should continue.

After the May 2008 attacks, IHOM staff members Father Michael Lapsley, Charles Obol and Alphonse visited Bonne Esperance and Aresta (Agency for Refugee Education, Skills Training and Advocacy), where refugees who had fled their homes were staying, and held meetings giving the refugees a safe space to share their experiences. Fr Michael apologised to them on behalf of other South Africans.

Later, with partners Africa Unite and the Western Cape Council of Churches, the IHOM held a series of seminars in Masiphumelele, to “hear the community’s voice” on xenophobia and allow positive stories to emerge regarding how locals had helped the refugees. Five subsequent workshops were held in other parts of Cape Town last year, to help community members overcome their feelings of anger, hatred, prejudice and guilt.

“The spirit of our community conversation in Philippi was that we can’t allow what happened in 2008, to happen again,” Alphonse said. “The community has its own wisdom, and we wanted to draw on that, which would have far more lasting results than if anyone came in from the outside to impose a solution.”
Two years ago Xolisa Mbuli*, a breadwinner for his siblings, was arrested as a robbery suspect in Cape Town. A policeman had beaten him up so badly that he had epilepsy and was wheelchair-bound.

He arrived at the Trauma Centre with his father, who had to do all the talking for him, because the attacks had also left him brain-damaged.

Trauma Centre social worker Gugu Shabalala outlined Xolisa’s story at an event that was hosted by the Trauma Centre and the Institute for Healing of Memories, to commemorate the United Nations International Day in Support of Torture, which fell on Saturday June 26.

The event was held on Friday June 25 at St Mark’s Church in District Six, Cape Town, with the theme “Demystifying Torture.”

Xolisa’s case was raised with the Independent Complaints Directorate, to no avail, Gugu said. “This is the kind of problem we often have to deal with,” she added. “In this case, there was a solid paper trail, and still we had no luck. In most cases, there is no record whatsoever.”
Remembering June 16 –
South African Youth Day and the Commemoration of the Soweto Uprising of 1976

BY THEMBA LONZI

The June 16 1976 commemorations have taken different forms in the past number of years in South Africa. The events include speakers from political parties, leaders of youth formations and famous musicians getting the crowds to dance as they enjoy the music. We’ve always believed that for the youth to learn about and from our past spaces need to be created for the youth to learn about and from our past. We believe spaces need to be created for the youth to listen and be allowed to speak their minds about events like June 16 1976.

We agreed with the partner organizations, CHUMA and the Cape Town Holocaust Centre, that our programme should include video clips about June 16 1976, discussions in small groups to allow the youth to share their thoughts, feelings and questions that came to mind while listening an watching the documentaries.

June 16 2010 event was another important gathering as we had organized for the youth to reflect, learn and grow from the experience. The other aspect of the event was to bring an exhibition from the holocaust center as part of the events of the day.

We had a good discussion with the learners after they watched a documentary about Ann Frank, a young person who had dreams and hopes but had to be in hiding because of the Nazi regime. We created an opportunity for the youth to look at the lives of 2 young people who had dreams and hopes for their future but could not fulfill them. We had a the opportunity to listen to young people sharing their thoughts about June 16 1976, what they can learn from it and what are they doing to make a better future for themselves and other people around them.

Many of the youth who attended had a clear understanding of what June 16 was about and they had questions about the past government decision to introduce Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in schools. “Why did the apartheid government introduce Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in communities where Afrikaans is not a first language”? The youth had a lot of questions about the issue around June 16 and the broader apartheid issue.

Some young people were grateful to the youth of 1976 for standing up for their rights to education and they acknowledged the fact that it’s not all okay yet in the education system in South Africa.

One young person said; 2010 is a different year than June 16, 1976 as now some schools have the important resources but some other schools continue to struggle for resources that will help them in their education. She said young people struggle in university to use a computer because computers are not available in other schools and the quality of education is not the same.

Some youth spoke about the need for today’s youth to appreciate what little they have because some youth don’t have anything.

We had a session where we spoke about our dreams and hope for South Africa. We began this session by reading Sandile Dikeni’s poem called “A dream for my country”. We started by asking learners to share what were the dreams Sandile had for his country. The youth went into small groups to their dream for South Africa. These were some of the things they discussed in the groups:

- Parents need to be fully involved in the education of their children
- Youth need to stop being involved in crime
- Youth need to be supported to deal with peer pressure
- Some politicians words promote racial division and are not helping in creating unity in South Africa

continued on 08
The temple bell rings out and the graduating seniors of the Pacific Buddhist Academy file into the Honpa Hongwanji temple for their final chapel service. This small school is committed to developing peacemakers. After chanting, incense, and the tearful sharing of faculty and students, we move downstairs where Fr. Michael shares his story. This is his first talk in Hawaii. The young people listen with interest and curiosity. They’ve never heard of apartheid. They listen intently. Their questions are thoughtful. They want to understand his journey and what he has learned about peacemaking and forgiveness. We are touched by their youth, emotion, and idealism.

Before the week is over, Fr. Michael will have spoken to judges, court personnel and a group called The Forgiveness Project. Women in prison will have heard his story and shared their own and the first Healing of Memories workshop in Hawaii will have been held. Members of Church of the Crossroads will learn the “bicycle theology” approach to restorative justice and a Buddhist congregation will welcome Fr. Michael and Thulani, his assistant, with open hearts and tease them that “Buddhists don’t believe in miracles” when a contrary projector seems to refuse to show the DVD.

Throughout the week, we saw that people here, as everywhere, are hungry for hope and healing and justice. We experienced again and again Fr. Michael’s powerful witness to resurrection living and social justice. Once again, we experienced the sacred space of the workshop and saw the transformation that can occur in that deceptively simple process of being truly heard and acknowledged. We were touched by Thulani’s good heart and Fr. Michael’s compassion and humor and how their gentleness created safety for the workshop participants.

Hawaii is literally half a world away from Cape Town. We wondered at times, during the months of preparation for this week, whether the workshop, the issues, the questions, would translate meaningfully in these islands. There was no need to worry. The women at the prison confirmed immediately the notion that those who become victimizers have often been victims themselves. They were predominantly women of color and they understood when apartheid was explained to them. Their willingness to share and examine their behavior was inspiring. Their beauty and hope shone through in the graceful hula they shared and in the lei and bouquets they gave us made from flowers from their own garden. They shared aloha, that Hawaiian spirit of love, generosity and hospitality, despite their circumstances. A workshop with them is a future goal.

At another session, a Native Hawaiian woman spoke of how the indigenous people of these islands still live with injustice, the loss of their nation, and the struggle to preserve and live their culture. She expressed surprise and gratitude that Fr. Michael responded with respect and expressed solidarity with indigenous peoples working for justice. Perhaps future workshops will bring together Hawaiians and non-Hawaiians to help heal the painful history of these islands and foster the mutual understanding that will allow us to move toward being a more just and peaceful community. The foundation has been laid and we will continue to develop IHOM’s work here.

It may seem curious that IHOM found its way to the Hawaiian Islands. Glenda Wildschut provided the connection. She came to Honolulu in 2007, at the invitation of Church of the Crossroads, United Church of Christ, to deliver the church’s bi-annual Watada lectures. Crossroads was founded in 1923 by a racially diverse group of high school students who believed they should be able to worship together at a time when Hawaii’s churches were segregated by ethnicity. The church has lived out this inclusive
Africa we have so many other issues to worry about.”
She tells them it is essential to prevent torture, “firstly because of the severity of the abuse, and secondly because it is often committed by state officials whose duty is to protect, not to inflict harm.”
“For me, it’s an indication of how far we’ve allowed our systems to deteriorate,” she told the gathering at St Mark’s. “When we don’t do anything about the one or two individuals abusing their power, the abuse becomes systemic.”
Fredericks gave some indication of the incidence of torture internationally, saying that more than 100 000 torture survivors receive treatment every year from organisations belonging to the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims.
Outrage over the US military’s human rights abuses at Guantanamo Bay had highlighted the problem of torture internationally, said Carnita, and Fr Michael pointed out that the Obama administration “has not lived up to expectations in relation to torture.”
“When he became President, Barrack Obama promised that he would close the notorious Guantanamo Bay interment camp in Cuba within one year. Very disappointingly, his administration has not done so,” Fr Michael said.

In a victory for activists, however, a judge had acquitted 24 activists with Witness Against Torture of charges of “unlawful entry with disorderly conduct”.
The activists had dressed as Guantanamo prisoners and protested on the steps of the Capitol, and performed a memorial service in the building where deceased state presidents lie, for three men who died at Guantanamo – as a result of torture, the evidence suggests.
“The International Day Against Torture is a rallying cry for human rights activists everywhere to redouble our efforts,” Fr Michael concluded. “We cannot rest until human beings across the planet cease torturing each other. For those of us who are followers of Jesus Christ, torture is of special significance, because we are the followers of the tortured one.
“For torture to end we must constantly break the silence around torture, condemn it whenever it happens, demand laws against torture, and that torturers should be made fully accountable.
“Perhaps the greatest antidote to torture is to build a human rights culture where we recognise all people as brothers and sisters – children of the same God.”

* His name has been changed.
To All Friends of the Institute

5 Eastry Rd 2nd Phase Fundraising and update

We are excited to report that through the generous donations from all our friends and supporters, we raised R335 566 for the 1st phase of the renovations to our new home thus far. We are deeply grateful for all your heart warming generosity and support.

Since December 2009 we have been happily ensconced in our new premises. We are all finding our offices and surrounding garden beautiful and pleasurably invigorating. This will no doubt make us even more productive.

The 2nd phase renovation process begins at the beginning of the year in 2011. This entails building a boardroom with 2 additional meeting spaces. To all who have contributed thus far we say a heartfelt thank you. This fundraising effort is aimed at those, who feel they could still contribute or have additional means to contribute further, as well as organisations who prefer to fund fixed assets.

Phase I will cost us R1,300,000.00 and Phase II will cost R517,700. Every contribution will be deeply appreciated.

Many thanks with prayers and blessings,
Remembering June 16 ... continued from page 4

- Young people need to have pride in who they are, be tolerant and communicate with other people
- The youth need to focus on education and stop smoking in school and attend classes
- Unity and stand for what you believe

The event had created an opportunity for the youth to learn about and from South Africa’s June 16 1976. We had some time to sing and dance with them and to hear what they had to say about June 16 1976 and issues affecting them today. I believe that the group we had with us on June 16 2010 have discovered something about themselves and will learn and grow in the future.

It’s been encouraging to hear the young voices sharing some important things about the past, present and future.

I would like to thank Institute for Healing of Memories, CHUMA and the Cape Town Holocaust Centre for partnership event we had. Thanks to the City of Cape Town for Contributing with the PA system and venue and the Government Communication Department for contributing bags, files, pens and writing pads for the event.

Healing of Memories in Hawaii ... continued from page 5

legacy through the decades, declaring itself a just peace and open and affirming church and providing a progressive Christian witness for peace, justice, and care of the environment. The Watada lectures are one expression of that witness.

Inspired by Glenda and eager to learn how South Africa’s experience might speak to social justice and trauma issues in Hawaii, a group of twelve church members journeyed to Cape Town the following year. We visited the Institute, watched the DVD, and dialogued with staff. We were moved by what we saw and heard. By the end of our visit, we, Liz and Linda, knew we wanted to become involved with IHOM. Many emails and months later, we were in New York, attending a Healing of Memories workshop and facilitator’s training and talking with Fr. Michael, Phyllis Rodriguez and Steve Karakashian about a workshop in Honolulu. We set a date, asked Church of the Crossroads to support our efforts as a fiscal sponsor, wrote grant proposals, contacted everyone we could think of who might be interested and received numerous emails of encouragement and advice from IHOM North America. May arrived and Fr. Michael and Thulani were here. The week was amazing and now we look ahead to the future of IHOM in Hawaii.

contact details

5 Eastry Road, Claremont 7708 South Africa
Phone: (+27-21) 683 6231 Fax: (+27-21) 683 5747
Email: info@healingofmemories.co.za
Website: www.healingofmemories.co.za

banking details

Standard Bank
Mowbray Branch, Main Road
Mowbray, Cape Town 7700 South Africa
Branch code 02-49-09
Name of account: Institute for Healing of Memories
Account #: 075133164 (Marketlink account)
Swift code: SBZAZAJJ