

**IAN STEHBENS
AND PACIFIC PEACEBUILDING**



*Beyond the idyllic images of tropical beaches and swaying palms,
there is another Pacific struggling to establish justice and peace.
What does it mean for Australians to be good neighbours in the region?*

Ethnic conflicts and continuing social unrest in various parts of the Pacific region continue to highlight the importance of engaging churches in regional conflict resolution, peace-building and reconciliation. Not least in addressing the psychological wounds of years of ethnic conflicts, churches can act as powerful sources of grassroots healing and local and national community leadership.



One of the Australians giving vital support to overcoming violence in the Pacific is **Ian Stehbens**.

Ian is founding Director of Pacific PeaceBuilding Initiatives and Principal of the Alan Walker College in Sydney, where, in response to conflicts in Bougainville, Solomon Islands and Fiji he has organised training in reconciliation theory and practice and mediation at the College since 1997. Indeed he has been an encourager and teacher of community leaders in areas of conflict

and persecution for many years and was instrumental in developing a strategy for community and personal healing in Bougainville after the war there. His recent research of the conflicts and cultures in the Southern Highlands of PNG has deepened his compassionate zeal for just-peacebuilding and, during his sabbatical leave in 2002 he studied under Dr John Paul Lederach, the internationally renowned peacebuilder. This passion and experience is now giving direction to the development of Pacific PeaceBuilding Initiatives.

Pacific Peacebuilding Initiatives (PPBI)

Ian's background has been significant in recognising the critical need for peace-building training – *transcending the logic and spirit of violence*. For whilst *Pacific Peacebuilding Initiatives* ultimate aim is the establishment of a just peace, the sustainable development needed to relieve and eradicate poverty also requires the training of national leaders, middle-level networkers and grassroots leaders who can develop peacebuilding initiatives with communities at the relevant level.

Established in 2003, PPBI has thus been bringing together Pacific Islands' church ministers and community leaders for training, employing leading peacemaking theorists and practitioners enabling participants to share the fruits of their rich and varied experiences. Such work has borne clear, practical fruits. As Ian comments: 'to hear someone like Festus Maeluma of the Solomon Islands explain the revenge cycle and the need to



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escape from it through forgiveness' brings 'an unforgettable change'. For Festus' nephew was beheaded during the conflict and he himself became a refugee. Through such personal stories and building of new community is conflict resolution achieved.



The Meaning behind the PPBI Logo

The Pacific PeaceBuilding Initiatives (PPBI) logo (left) was designed to signify the ministry of reconciliation in the cultures of the Pacific, in the aftermath of colonialism and which is a counter to escalating global violence.

The *descending dove* depicts the Spirit of God and invites us to hear the Voice of God.

The *dove* is a symbol of peace, shalom and salaam.

The *dove bearing a new olive leaf* depicts the hope of a renewed earth.

The *deep-sea sailing canoe* represents the Christian Church, which exists for a ministry of reconciliation.

The *pattern of ocean waters* invites repentance and forgiveness, a dying to self and a rising to new life.

The *finely woven mat* is the finest gift and an implement of reconciliation and peacebuilding in cultures of the Pacific.

The *circle of mat* invites community leaders to sit together to weave a network of those committed to building a *just peace*.

The *soft dawning* is of a new heaven and a new earth, or a *vanua* in harmony.

Pacific Peacebuilding through the National Council of Churches in Australia

Australian churches continue to enlarge their history of peacebuilding across the Pacific. In this *Decade to Overcome Violence* effective partnerships have thus also been extended by many others, not least through the Christian World Service (the overseas development arm of the National Council of Churches in Australia)



Recent important projects have included:

- The *Peace Office Program of the Solomon Islands Christian Association (SICA)* – which has been working hard to develop a Truth & Reconciliation Commission process and developing capacity building within civil society to complement the reconstruction of a stable society following Operation 'Helpem Fren' led by Australian peacemakers
- The *Ecumenical Centre for Research Education and Advocacy (ECREA)* - which has given a strong to community development training and peace building among young people. A training manual and workshops has been developed to assist Pacific Peace Builders.

Sources and more information:

www.ppbi.org.au

www.ncca.org.au/cws/at_work_with_our_partners/pacific