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Sad Spectacle

OVER THE next fortnight, officials and environment ministers from 194 countries gather at the coastal resort of Cancun, Mexico.

Altogether an estimated 15 000 people will discuss and argue about ways to stop global temperatures rising above dangerous levels as a result of man-made emissions.

Each year the Conference of the Parties (COP) – set up in terms of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change – meets to discuss progress. This is COP 16. The ultimate aim is a global deal that commits the world to cutting greenhouse gases by 50 percent by 2050.

Cancun is the latest stop of the caravan of climate-change summitry, as it lumbers from Rio 1992 via Kyoto 1997 and Copenhagen last year.

After Cancun, the next stop is Durban in 2011 and Korea after that. It is hoped that a global deal will be reached by 2012 when the Kyoto Protocol comes to an end.

While expectations for a breakthrough were high in Copenhagen last December, only the naive are expecting anything of the sort in Mexico.

To compound the gloom, resolve is faltering on the part of the most important Western player.

When Barack Obama took office, he pledged that the US would cut carbon emissions by 17 percent. But the promise was conditional on Congress giving assent – and that hope has evaporated after the Republican gains in the US midterm elections.

No wonder so many world leaders are staying away from Cancun, unwilling to be associated with the possibility of failure, while those attending the talks are setting the bar as low as possible. South Africa, to its credit, has sent a high-profile team.

A global deal to cut emissions will remain elusive as long as the US and China, the two biggest emitters of greenhouse gases, are hamstrung.

The US is unable to make any commitments on cutting emissions because it would be impossible for Obama to get any legislation through Congress. This means China is also reluctant to move until it is certain that the US will also cut emissions.

The world, sadly, watches as this spectacle unfolds. Sadly, too, that Cancun, won't yield much.



You & Me
ROD SMITH

THE FOUR Fs of avoiding intimacy:
Flight: Running from intimacy – keeping an emotional arm's length from those who appear to want something more, something deeper. This, of course, is not literally running away. People can flee "inside" while appearing to widely embrace others. Often the life and soul of a party, these men and women are frequently attractive and made more so, for some, by their elusiveness.

Fright: Fearing being taken over, or being "occupied", this person is constantly on duty, like an armed sentry against a hidden enemy. He or she can scare others almost involuntarily through expressions of misplaced anger and socially inappropriate behaviours. "He's edgy. He's scary. I am not sure why," you might hear yourself saying.

Fight: Combating sincere attempts at intimacy, this person fights in order to keep people away. Everything becomes about winning or losing; fighting is a way of life, winning is everything. "Just when we get close," you might find yourself saying, "he/she finds some difficulty with something inextricably me".

Freeze: Isolating, ("ice-olating") this person neither runs nor attacks, he or she simply remains emotionally immobilised. This is control through passivity. "The closer I get the more vacant he/she appears." The pursuer will appeal, work, wave, rant and stamp – to little avail.

□ Rod Smith is a family therapist who lives in the US. E-mail questions to Rod@DifficultRelationships.com

Our quest for goodness remains elusive

For as long as peace is tied to politics, there will be no solution because there can be no peace without justice

HOW many of us know, as we go about our daily lives, that on our very doorstep there have been mass-scale massacres within our borders, and in Zimbabwe at the hands of the Gukurahundi, in Zanzibar, in Biafra, by the Algerian Harkis, and the Mau Mau anti-colonial rebellion in Kenya?

Outside Africa, the pattern is no different. In the Middle East, the Armenian massacre in Turkey comes to mind; and in Asia Suharto's slaughter of half a million Indonesians. Then there are the actions of imperial Japan and the effects of Hindu and Muslim fundamentalists, and so on.

Throughout the ages, despite violent atrocities that no single racial, ethnic or national group can be exempt from, there has always been an eternal quest for peace.

But the goal is an elusive one, like catching fire-flies on a summer's night. Here and there we see its glow and know the delights of its offerings, but we cannot grasp its essence.

A recent book entitled *Hushed Voices*, edited by Professor Heribert Adam, traces the unacknowledged atrocities of the 20th century and hence confirms the never-ending spiral of violence.

He states that unlike widely reported genocides, such as those in Nazi Germany, Rwanda and Cambodia, some atrocities remain unacknowledged, are denied and

excluded from history books. Yet the buried part is important, not only because perpetrators of gross human rights violations should be held accountable, but because victims and their descendants warrant recognition.

Moreover, "unacknowledged atrocities breed resentment as they taint the collective identity of a nation and cause divisions when future generations challenge the sanitised versions of history. Official silence about past misdeeds suggests complicity and promotes impunity. Above all, non-acknowledgement prevents learning from past injustices."

Recently I was afforded the opportunity to deliver the annual Desmond Tutu peace lecture organised by the KZN chapter of the World Conference on Religion for Peace (WCRP). Although one acknowledges that the struggle for peace has no boundaries, the stark reality of the politics of peace confronted us when a representative of the Temple David – which magnanimously gave the organisers the use of its hall – addressed the audience, decrying the role that Archbishop Emeritus Tutu had taken in support of a cultural boycott of Israel.

This, then, is the very crux of the challenge to global peace: there will always be



Devi's Diary
DEVI RAJAB

many sides and views on any matter of political dispensation. For as long as peace is tied to politics, there will never be a real solution since there can be no peace without justice.

However, there are some universals that bind us more easily together as the world celebrates the release of Myanmar's democracy icon and Nobel peace prize human rights activist, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, who Tutu admirably referred to as "Asia's Mandela".

Brave

Her courage in enduring 20 years of house arrest in a treacherous regime that, despite her release violates the human rights of its citizenry with wanton abandon, has inspired world recognition of her plight.

In his book *Made for Goodness*, Tutu awakens our moral compass when he says: "You can see from the people we truly admire that we are attracted to goodness. We do not revere people who are materially successful. We might envy them and wish that their

money was transferred to our bank account. But the people we revere are not necessarily successful, they are something else. They are selfless and good. Many of us would say we revere Mother Teresa. She wasn't macho. She wasn't even successful. In spite of her many years of lauded and dedicated ministry, people still die of poverty in Calcutta. But even after her death Mother Teresa is still admired, respected and revered.

"Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King are similarly revered, for their shining example of their goodness. In our time we are fortunate to have Nelson Mandela who can walk into any place and people are transfixed – not because he is mighty and macho, but because he is gracious and good."

Tutu asks the rhetorical question of all SA: "How can we inculcate the practice of choosing good?" We can pattern ourselves on people who have developed the practice. There are people who seem to select the good even when it seems not to serve their best

interests. There is a universal strain that seems to run through the lives of martyrs who stand firm in the face of certain death.

When Tutu chaired SA's Truth and Reconciliation Commission he heard tales of many atrocities, but what stood out for him was the incredible courage that these human beings had. They endured torture and death in the belief that freedom would come for others left behind. Such was their altruism.

He cites a touching case of Phila Portia Ndwandwe, a nursing mother and commander of the MK in Swaziland who was kidnapped and tortured before she was finally executed. For 10 days, her kidnappers kept her naked in a closed room on a farm in KZN. They wanted her to reveal the plans of her unit. She maintained her silence. I would rather die, she told them.

On the 10th day she formed a pair of panties for herself from a blue plastic bag, a piece of rubbish she found lying around. When her body was exhumed by her killers, her skeleton was recognised by the blue plastic bag that still clung to her pelvic bones. "God, was she brave," one of her murderers testified.

When I interviewed Indian women involved in the apartheid struggle, Rajes Pillay

and Shanthi Naidoo stood out. Rajes Pillay was involved in the armed struggle, and spent 12 years in exile in Swaziland, where comrades were hounded like rodents by the SA police. They were shot at, kidnapped and bombed.

There was the real ugly side to it all when women exiles would have to get on to their knees and hands, and literally pick up the pieces of skin and bones and clean up after the destruction. During the Two Sticks massacre, she recalls: "I saw an ANC refugee pick up a piece of cloth from the debris of the bombed houses and he said, 'this is my daughter's dress.'"

The mental and psychological damage was too severe for Pillay, who has been in and out of mental institutions after her return to SA. Naidoo was held under the Terrorism Act in solitary confinement for more than 360 days for refusing to testify against 22 ANC members.

They included Winnie Mandela, Ruth First, Joyce Sikakane, Barbara Hogan, Dorothy Nyembe and others. As her result of her refusal to testify, the court could not proceed with the hearings.

Perhaps South Africans are not fully cognisant of the richness of their non-material culture that lies in our people, who continue to bring home the trophies to a mixed reception – marred only by the politics of colour.

● Devi Rajab is a psychologist.

Don't Be A Fathead

TRAVEL broadens the mind, it's long been said. Now it's official. Research shows that taking a walk, covering at least 10km a week, literally expands the size of the brain. If this research encourages even a few people to slide off their sofas and out of doors, that can only be a good thing for a whole host of reasons, not all to do with brain size.

As a nation (Britain), is visibly fatter than we were. We have only to compare and contrast photographs of street scenes taken today with those taken in the 1950s and 1960s to observe the growth in the national waistline. We are none the better for this expansion, with even children suffering from the kind of obesity-related health complications that were almost unknown a generation ago.

Whether this trend towards a stationary existence can be reversed – and the nation made cleverer at the same time – is questionable.

Significantly, the report urging us to walk further coincides with news that the nation is expected to spend a record amount of money today shopping on the internet. As one of the main motivations for going out of doors was to shop, the statistics bode ill for any drive to get us out and about. A radical solution, of course, would be to ban internet shopping. We walk more – and our minds get sharper. Sounds like a no-brainer. – The Independent, London

E-mail merletter@inl.co.za, fax 031 308 2715, or post letters to: The Editor, PO Box 47549, Greyville 4023. Letters must carry the author's signature, name and address.

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E-mailed letters should also include a physical address and telephone number. The editor reserves the right to edit or shorten letters. Letters with pseudonyms will only be published in exceptional circumstances.

IF DEVELOPMENT HAD GONE BY THE BOOK NO ONE COULD HAVE STOPPED IT

ARTHUR Konigkramer's letter "How can a small group sabotage small-craft harbour plan?" (The Mercury November 26) begs the question: how can a small group of people sabotage the Point development?

The answer is it cannot. Had the developers gone by the book, nobody would be able to stop it. Neels Brink, director of the developing company, has stated that "development had been delayed by town planning

approval". The authorisation received was subject to all land ownership issues being resolved, none of which have occurred. To date no application has even been made to purchase the seabed, on which the small craft harbour was to be built.

The Durban Paddle Ski Club has always kept fees to a bare minimum (currently R250 a year) because we believe access to the sea is a constitutional right and should be affordable to all and

today, 14 percent of our membership (334 and not 20 as Konigkramer states) consists of people of colour.

The social impact assessment done by Di Scott showed that 80 percent of people frequenting Vetch's Beach were not members of any club, and stated "Vetch's Beach is a public beach that is accessible and affordable to the whole public".

Should we accept what has been forced down our throats, we need

to raise R20 million to R30m to construct our clubhouse to accommodate all the boating clubs. What would the fees be then?

Since apartheid has been dragged into this, could he tell us what benefit the small-craft harbour would hold for the disadvantaged? How many underprivileged people would buy his luxury apartments and moor their yachts in his marina. If ever there was a development that would only benefit the elite, this is it.

The boating clubs on the Point contribute over half a billion rands to GDP annually and sustain 4 100 jobs, with no risk to the rate- and taxpayer. This information is in the same economic study from which he quotes but chooses to ignore.

His so-called apartheid beach is a government-designated boating launch site to serve the interests of all the city's residents and visitors, a mere 300m stretch out of a 100km eThekweni coastline.

Konigkramer should not be afraid of us; he should be afraid of the Save Vetch's Association who enjoy a much wider support including that of the Wildlife Society of South Africa.

It is they that have applied their constitutional rights to challenge the small-craft harbour in court simply because the whole process has been flawed from the beginning. The Durban Paddle Ski Club issue is irrelevant, as the developers have still no national or

local authorisation to commence with any construction.

As much as I'd love to accept the accolades he has showered upon our little club, we cannot take the credit for holding up his precious harbour. Neither can we be blamed for the plight of the San people, but thank him for the history lesson anyway.

JOHNNY VASSILAROS
Chairman
Durban Paddle Ski Club

Are women second-class citizens?

THE Ministry of Women, Children and Persons with Disabilities is promoting its "16 Days of Activism" campaign, which encourages men to refrain from abusing women and children. A noble cause indeed!

However, I am never sure of the efficacy of this campaign,

but nevertheless believe it's better than nothing. (I cannot help remembering that during last year's campaign, there were numerous news headlines reporting rape of babies and abuse of women.)

Am I the only woman in South Africa who objects to being lumped into a "Ministry

of Women, Children and People with Disabilities"?

This categorises women as "second-class citizens". No wonder the abuse of women continues unabated in South Africa.

MD MITCHELL
Hillcrest

Torture: Why stop at 'terrorists'?

NOT only do I think torturing "suspected" terrorists is acceptable I think it should be taken further; after all, in the Middle Ages 100 000 witches masquerading as old women very quickly admitted the error of their ways after having their feet stuck in a fire.

Think of the havoc they would have wrought if they hadn't been exposed.

Why stop at terrorism? I'm sure an annual session of simulated drowning for the population as a whole would at least cut down on the hassle of having to catch people offending as opposed to them admitting the sins of the past year and begging to make restitution.

ALLAN FIRBANK
Durban

Sars shows disregard for disabled

AS A government institution Sars should have disabled parking bays outside their entrance.

The disregard for the disabled continues to be a glaring omission despite our allegedly modern constitution.

The Durban office of Sars

has a large number of stairs that a disabled person has to try to climb up, some having to be hauled up in their wheelchairs by family or caregivers.

Sars expect compliance with their rules, requests and demands yet do not facilitate the vulnerable people whose

tax they continue to enjoy. Please wise up, Sars Durban, and get facilities for the disabled at your branch, such as disabled parking bays in front of your building and a ramp next to your stairs.

CILLA WEBSTER
Scottburgh