

Australian Ministry for Peace



Biannca Pace introduces the speakers
From left: Sara Nathan, Dr Keith Suter, Manish Thapa & Dr Arthur Chesterfield-Evans

Topic “Is it time for a Ministry for Peace?”

Speakers: Dr Keith Suter,
Dr Arthur Chesterfield-Evans,
Manish Thapa & Sara Nathan

On Tuesday July 5, 2010 Biannca Pace, Chair of the 'Australian Ministry for Peace, invited an esteemed panel of four diverse speakers to discuss various aspects of the global Ministry of Peace concept at the biannual International Peace Research Association (IPRA) conference at Sydney University.

Firstly, Dr Keith Suter, author of the book "An Australian Campaign for a Ministry for Peace" explained the lateral thinking which prompted him to reconsider the peace movement's combative approach in the early 1980's.

He saw an opportunity for the peace movement to switch to a more peaceful approach via a seat in parliament.

A Minister for Peace could lobby to make the peaceful settlements of disputes mainstream knowledge. This could benefit Australian communities.

A Minister for Peace could work to overcome the financial obstacles to peace by granting organizations that advocate for peace with some tax incentives.

A Department of Peace could also work to ensure a peace perspective be introduced in mainstream education. In short, Dr Suter outlined how, in various ways, a MFP could ensure that Australia moves towards a culture of Peace.



Next, Dr Arthur Chesterfield-Evans outlined the steps needed to put in place a Department of Peace in Government. He explained that actually creating a Department of Peace is very easy. The Premier or Prime Minister can simply create a department. This happens usually after he or she wins the elections and the ministries are created and posts filled. Some ministries are minor, and could even be argued to be mere window-dressing in that they have few resources and few programmes. However even if they mainly just collect statistics, (such as the Minister for Women in NSW), this would at least let the possible savings by more peaceful policies be cost savings.

Dr Chesterfield-Evan's practical and common sense perspective stem from knowledge he has gained through experience. Originally a cardio-thoracic surgeon, common sense then caused him to switch to becoming a campaigner for preventative health policy. He explained that preventive health is the model for preventive social policy, where you try to stop problems before they occur.

He articulated how preventative social policy is more effective than band-aid solutions like prison, which drain resources and fail to make society more secure. He likened the need for a Ministry for Peace as the same as the environment needing a lobby against all the economic forces which seek to exploit it for private profit.

Dr Chesterfield-Evans agreed with Dr Suter in saying that proactive policies in schools would help lessen conflicts. He expressed passionately that we need a view of history where peace is the norm, not the boring bits between wars. The perceived boring bits could become times of great inspiration and prosperity.



For Dr Chesterfield-Evans a Department of Peace would "try to make peace the norm and foster peace and harmony in all social interactions. As such it needs to lobby at the cabinet table, which is where all the decisions are actually made."

Above:
Dr Arthur Chesterfield-Evans

Below:
Dr Keith Suter



In 2006 as part of the peace agreement, Nepal implemented a ministry of Peace and Reconstruction. The third speaker, Manish Thapa, the original chair of the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction in Nepal, answered the question: "How is the Ministry for Peace Nepal helping to keep the peace?" In his talk he explained The MFP provides a place to handle conflicts, manage peace building efforts and is also an avenue for conflict resolution.

In 2008 Nepal hosted a high level panel on peace and conflict management. Sixty three local peace committees created a forum for peace at a community level.

Last, but not least, Human Rights activist Sara Nathan from the Australian Tamil Congress, investigated a hypothetical question close to her heart: "If a Ministry for Peace existed, how could it have facilitated the Sri Lankan Tamil's quest for self determination?." In a stimulating and thought provoking speech Sara concluded that a Sri Lankan ministry of peace could have provided the instruments that could have allowed the conflict to be much less violent and damaging.

Esteemed Peace Professor Johan Galtung sat in the front row and observed and delighted in the session immensely. Afterwards he made a positive statement to the effect that he supported a Ministry or Department of Peace. He also retold an anecdote from 1964, when he met with three ministers: A Prime Minister, A Foreign Minister and A Defence Minister.



He explained the Ministry for Peace proposal to all of them, at the end of which the Defence Minister concluded that he would be out of a job if this really worked! Shortly afterwards an online petition was created to request that the Australian PM employ a Minister for Peace. Citizens from all over the globe are now signing the petition.

Visit - <http://bit.ly/peacepetition>

Above:
Manish Thapa

Below:
Sara Nathan



Dr Keith Suter, is a Global Strategist, a social commentator, strategic planner, conference speaker, writer and broadcaster. He is the foreign affairs expert on Sunrise, the number one Australian breakfast show, presenting his own segment, Global Notebook and a foreign affairs analyst for Sky TV Australia and Radio 4BC, Brisbane. Keith Suter can be heard on Australian radio on an average of once a day.

As a respected thinker and communicator, Dr Keith Suter is often selected as a speaker on global issues. As a member of the most prestigious global think tank in the world, The Club of Rome, Keith Suter is among the elite thinkers and influences internationally. The Club has only 100 members and includes people like Mikhail Gorbachev, Bill Gates, Al Gore and Jimmy Carter.

Keith's reputation is recognised worldwide. He is Senior Fellow, Global Business Network Australia and the Executive Director of National Goals and Directions - Suter's thinking is a valuable addition to this think tank which specifically works on Australia's future. Keith writes the history page for The Daily Telegraph, and is the author of 50 Things You Want to Know About World Issues and in 1983 authored the book 'An Australian Campaign for a Ministry for Peace'.



From left: Dr Keith Suter, Bianca Pace, Professor Johan Galtung, Manish Thapa, Sara Nathan & Dr Arthur Chesterfield-Evans

Dr Arthur Chesterfield-Evans is the immediate Past NSW leader of the Australian Democrats. He is also a doctor and a surgeon. As a cardio-thoracic surgeon he realised that a lot of hearts and lungs he was operating on really didn't need to be operated on, so he started climbing billboards and enhancing them, for the BUGGER UP campaign. He then became president of the Non-Smokers movement of Australia and through his diligent work in Parliament brought about the banning of Cigarette smoking in restaurants and public areas.

He was active in establishing the 'No War in Iraq' Coalition which in early 2003 organised a massive public demonstration that drew over half a million people onto the street of Sydney. In 2006 he travelled to the World Peace Forum in Canada where he appeared on a panel which included Congressman Denis Kucinich, the American Politician who first drafted and tabled a Bill for a Dept of Peace in the US Congress.

Sara Nathan is from the Australian Tamil Congress. Sara has been a human rights activist for over 26 years and a Red Cross volunteer for over 18 years. She is an ethnic Tamil and has been a proud Australian for over 22 years. In the past year, she has been an advocate for refugee rights, especially for the Tamil Asylum seekers. Sara works tirelessly to assist in the self determination of the Tamil people of Sri Lanka.

She was detained and deported from Indonesia when she travelled there to raise awareness of the plights of 240 Sri Lankan Tamils, stranded on a boat at Merak in Western Java. And risked her life to take larger sized clothing to a pregnant woman who could no longer fit into her clothes, such was the length of time that she was left stranded on that boat.

Manish Thapa founded the regional Coordinator of the South Asian Regional Cooperation Academic Network. Manish Thapa is the original chair of Ministry for Peace Nepal. He is also the founder and regional Coordinator of the South Asian Regional Cooperation Academic Network. Some of his research & teaching areas include:

Theories on Peace & Conflict Studies; Post Conflict Security (with special emphasis on: Peace Keeping, Security Sector Reform, Arms Control, Disarmament, Regional Security Challenges etc); Non-Traditional Security Issues and Prospects of Regional Cooperation in South Asia

Some of his journal articles, book chapters and reports include: From Bullet to Ballot: The Politics of Peace in Nepal – Building Global Solidarity for Strengthening the Emerging Democracy in Nepal –: Creating a Positive Revolution for Sustainable Change; The role of civil society & political parties in the current nation/state Building process in Nepal.

Some of the positions he has held include: Consultant, in the Child Protection Section, of UNICEF in Bhutan, Consultant/Advisor to Nepal Peacebuilding Survey Project, Co-Chair of the Internal Conflict Commission of IPRA and since 2006 has been on the Board of Directors and in fact is the Founding Executive Director of the Asian Study Centre for Peace & Conflict Transformation.

Photos courtesy of: Juliet Bennet & Grace Hari
Panelist biographies compiled by: Bianca Pace
Report written by: Grace Hari

