

Patricia Pak Poy RSM , ed., *A Path is made by walking it: Reflections on the Australian Network to Ban Landmines 1991-2006* (East Kew Victoria: David Lovell Publishing, 2006) Launch -Centre for Peace And Conflict Studies Arundel Street Glebe 1st March 2007

Thank you to Sr Patricia Pak Poy and Susan for inviting me here tonight to participate in the launch of *A Path is made by walking on it*, the story of the Australian contribution to the International Campaign to Ban Landmines

I come as an outsider: though I represent an organization that had a seminal part in the early part of the campaign I myself did not have direct involvement, apart from being a signatory to the petition, I think only once!. At the time I was working with refugees fleeing the Bosnia war -know well the effects of unexploded ordinance including anti personnel landmines upon victims and the indiscriminate way they destroy lives, mostly young, long after the soldiers have gone home

This is an Important publication. It is not merely a valuable historical document or a way of reading about the activities of some people with whom we might be acquainted. It rather records a unique combination of people identifying and working for a common cause:

The convention derived much of its strength from its unique origins in the combined efforts of international organizations as the ICRC and NGOs as well as diplomats and military representatives....While these groups did not always agree, the diversity resulted in fruitful, creative tension and we never lost sight of our common goal to end the suffering caused by anti personal landmines. (Alexander Downer: Foreword)

It is, as a result an invaluable reflection upon ways of advocating for change.

The book cites multiple factors behind the success of the campaign:

- The discrete and clear nature of the issue
- A pragmatic but credible leadership
- The Internationalism of the advocacy involved -particularly fascinating was the story of the meeting of John Howard with Jean Chretien. At the same time the campaign delegated its public communication to an international leadership group.
- The broad church of people involved. This gave rise to what Eric Sidoti labelled: "astute analysis of the external environment". In his words:

Judgements will always tend to be made on timing capacity and likely allies. What the landmines campaign demonstrates is that these need to be informed judgements. Internationally and in Australia part of the landmines campaign leadership's astuteness lay in accessing a broad range of people (diplomats academics and military experts among them) who knowledge and skills proved immensely valuable in making such judgements. (Sidoti 104)

- The style of campaigning: the agencies approached their lobbying with a high degree of professionalism. They did not seek to embarrass political and bureaucratic actors but rather to build a case that would be impregnable in the face of counterattack" (38)
- The personal witness of so many, the fact that the wide variety of victims reflected well the indiscriminate nature of the weapon's reach, and the way in which this personal testimony was placed at the disposal of the campaign through such media as photography (John Rodsted's contribution is a delight).
- The Broad partisanship though notwithstanding some differences of approach
- A short focussed public campaign that used established religious networks in particular.
- The realisation that humanitarian advocacy has a particular and valid role to play in our society:

...human rights and humanitarian advocacy are essentially political undertakings. At the heart of all such activity is a desire not just to influence but actually to shape and to change the behaviour of those exercising power, be they governments, their agents, their opponents or increasingly economic actors such as major corporations. (Eric Sidoti 113)

The most important reason for the success of the campaign however, the principle that underlies all of the above, is contained within the title. In the Introduction Sr Pak Poy speaks of a finely paved path laid in the small park on the corner next to the cathedral in Adelaide. The true path veers off from it at a slightly sharper angle and is quicker -it remains a well-trodden track across the grass: "The people know what the planners seem to have missed - a path is made by walking it". (2)

What I took from this was that the path forged by the landmines campaign was made by people simply *doing* it. As you have faced problems you have come up

with creative solutions; you have remained flexible and open, though clear about what is not to be negotiated. You have pushed aside personal prejudices in order to achieve a greater aim. As Katherine Massam says, you embodied: "on the one hand a refusal to take no for an answer when policies appear solidly set and, on the other, a commitment to the art of the possible, to doing what one could, learning the language and dynamics of governments and international negotiations " (136) You have lastly been willing to make mistakes knowing that they help us on our journey to the truth.

In short you have dared to come together and *act*.

The journey of course is not over. Anti-vehicle mines and cluster munitions as well as the less than comprehensive coverage of the treaty remain huge challenges for us all to overcome. Last week, forty-six nations meeting in Oslo signed a pledge calling upon a 2008 treaty banning cluster bombs. The United Kingdom, Canada and Germany all signed the pledge. Australia was not in attendance.

In these times I can't help but wonder what has happened to the relationship between government and NGO's in this country and what opportunities for human dignity have been missed because of the breakdown of this relationship.

The passage to Australia of 83 Sri Lankans seeking asylum has given us all, but we in the refugee field particularly, another opportunity. There is an urgent need for leadership, imagination and creativity to try to break down the categories of thinking and relating to which we have all become accustomed. There is an urgent need to create broad networks of dialogue in which we can begin to advance some of the intractable issues of our time.

This is an exciting and hopeful book to read. It is both a record of what can be achieved and an encouragement for those of us still there to go out and achieve it. Congratulations to Sr Patricia Pak Poy, Jody Williams and all the people involved in this campaign. You are not only campaigners but you are also teachers. My hope is that the lessons learnt will be heeded and taken on board by a new generation of advocates. Heaven knows our world needs them.