# THE INDRA CONGRESS

(International Development of the Arts for Reconciliation))

# Newsletter

# January 2011 Issue No 1

Dear friends

I am writing to you because you were on the mailing list for the ARROW programme (Art: a Resource for Reconciliation Over the World) newsletter. Since our last newsletter, following the hugely successful 2010 Global Congress, there have been major developments.

The Global Congress was a transformative experience for many of the participants and co-ordinators, myself included. It was a privilege and a pleasure to be there and share the very special, creative and compassionate energy the young people, artists and educators from around the world created during the week. However, following the euphoria of the Congress I was soon to be presented with a dilemma and a challenge regarding the future.

The relatively new Principal, Margaret Noble, asked to see me and told me that, despite the success of this event, UCP Marjon would not be able to continue direct support of the grassroots work undertaken by ARROW to date, working with young people in the West Bank, Sierra Leone, India etc. Instead there was a need now for ‘reorienting the ARROW project to become an integral part of the UCP Marjon offer.’ The focus would be on training, research and other activities conducive to the enhancement of student numbers and the wider generation of income. There would be a co-ordinator, appointed for a year on a 0.2 contract (one day per week) to achieve this aim. Lesley Alcock was to be transferred to a new Regional Affairs Community & Enterprise office and Dawn Melville was offered alternative employment. The current Advisory group would be dissolved and replaced by a board chaired by the Principal and consisting of UCP Marjon personnel. It was made clear to me that, in the management’s view, they ‘owned’ ARROW.

In response I made an alternative proposal. It was clear from the summer that the idea of a rolling programme of Congress events, taking place in different parts of the world, is a central thread in ARROW’s trajectory: the ‘art and soul’ of the programme. However, I understood and accepted that UCP Marjon did not feel able to financially support this work. I therefore suggested that I establish ARROW as an independent Community Interest/Social Enterprise Company, committed to developing the core creative, networking activity. This would enable us to bid for and access resources currently not available to a university institution. UCP Marjon would make no financial contribution other than the use of space. I would raise the resources for the grassroots activity myself and we would work as partners, setting up a formal partnership arrangement which helps all parties achieve their objectives: a partnership in which practice feeds research and vice versa.

The management turned down this offer. They would consider the formation of a social enterprise sometime in the future, but it would be a UCP Marjon company, owned and controlled by management.

I discussed the situation with the ARROW partners from across the UK and overseas. They were unanimous in deciding it was time to move on. What was ‘ARROW’ had come of age and needed now to operate outside the frame of a single institution. The partners were passionate about the need to stay together and build on the momentum of the summer event, which had endorsed strong bonds between us all. ARROW would remain at UCP Marjon and we would create a social enterprise company to continue the grassroots work under a new heading.

**The image of Indra’s net**

Over the Autumn we have been exploring an extraordinary metaphor, which has roots in 3rd century Buddhism and beyond. It is the image of Indra’s Net:

Once upon a time the god Indra made a large net to cover the whole world.  Each point of intersection consisted of a beautiful, precious pearl.  None of the pearls existed by themselves except as a reflection of each other and of all the pearls in the net.  In turn the whole net relied on each individual pearl for its existence.

In some versions the intersections are referred to as jewels, in others pearls. The use of pearls in the net adds a further dimension as pearls of great beauty arise from situations of conflict, abrasive grit and aeons of patience. Indra’s Net is also a reference point for some contemporary physicists and environmental scientists who use it as a metaphor for the concept of interdependence.

The summer Congress, bringing together young people, artists and educators from around the world, epitomized our intentions with ARROW and with the newly emerging idea. We have therefore set up a Community Interest Company to move this grassroots work forward and have decided to call it THE INDRA CONGRESS. The initials INDRA can also stand for ‘International Development of the Arts for Reconciliation’.   In the first instance myself and Dawn Melville are Directors of the Company and the UK and overseas partners are ‘members.’

I will leave UCP Marjon in August 2011 and will commit myself to develop THE INDRA CONGRESS, raise resources and seek to build a diverse range of partnerships in the arts world, with universities, schools and elsewhere – here in the UK and overseas. We have already targeted Derry as the venue for the Global INDRA CONGRESS 2013.

We are seeking to build up an extensive Friends of INDRA network. As I said at the beginning you have received this communication because you were on the mailing list for ARROW. If you do not wish to continue receiving news and information from the new INDRA CONGRESS do please let us know. Please also contact us if you are aware of any potential funding opportunities, or you know people, organisations or institutions that might like to partner with us

In this time of financial uncertainty I am realistic and fully aware of the challenges that lie ahead. However, the young people and co-ordinators in the UK and overseas share with Dawn and I a passionate belief that we have something valuable to offer this vulnerable world of ours. The young people and practitioners who came to Plymouth in the summer to share the committed and creative work they do in their communities, who laughed together, cried together and played together, were a living source of inspiration.

It is time to move on.

Despite the pervading economic gloom I hope 2011 is a wonderful year for you.

Warm wishes

David Oddie

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