

Liz Croton reflects on the 2002 ICMDA World Congress, held in Taiwan



Faith moving mountains

There's always a big temptation to sign up for a Christian Conference on account of the exotic location. I had always wanted to visit Taiwan. It had always captured my imagination even though I knew little about it and had met few people who'd been there.

So there was a slight pang of guilt about my motives as I filled out the application form for the World Congress of the International Christian Medical and Dental Association (ICMDA) held in Taipei in July 2002. The theme was 'The Transforming Power of Christ in Medicine'. This event comes around every four years and brings together arguably the largest collection of Christian medics and dentists from around the globe.

Taiwan is self-governing and maintains an uneasy relationship with Mainland China, which lies little more than 160 km across the Taiwan Strait. Taipei, the capital, was certainly an exciting venue for an international Christian conference. There is respect for Christianity even though most of the people have a Buddhist and Taoist background.

The conference took place in one of Taipei's largest youth centres, run by the China Youth Corps. Delegates could either opt to stay in the centre, sharing dorms with Christians from around the world, or stay elsewhere in the city.

It became clear almost immediately on our arrival on the island that events involving a combination of foreign medics and Christians were not commonplace in this part of the world. The Taiwanese are fantastic hosts. The word got round and people we met, hearing that we were medical, immediately asked if we had something to do with 'that conference in Taipei'. This offered a number of us exciting opportunities to share our faith.

The ICMDA conference began with the student programme, with the same theme as the adult conference. The students numbered around 250 representing 45 countries. I was able to catch a few days of this. The speakers tackled topics such as sex and relationships, money and power as well as evangelism and mission-based themes.

The proximity of Taiwan to a number of countries where persecution of Christians is rife – namely Vietnam, Indonesia and China, enabled many of their students to attend. Sadly, other areas of high persecution such as the Middle East were largely unrepresented.

While all doctors know that saline is an excellent resuscitation fluid, the American contingent of the conference took this fact to another dimension by presenting the 'Saline Solution Seminar'. This seminar was designed to facilitate the sharing of faith in a professional context. I confess that I was slightly cynical about how well this would translate into non-American medical scenarios with

THIS EVENT... BRINGS TOGETHER ARGUABLY THE LARGEST COLLECTION OF CHRISTIAN MEDICS AND DENTISTS FROM AROUND THE GLOBE

patients. I was silenced however, by a number of moving testimonies from doctors around the world as to its great usefulness in their daily work. This seminar is due to be adapted to more closely fit the British working environment in the near future.

The doctors' conference had a more formal feel after the spontaneity of the student conference. The doctors brought the numbers up to around 800. Morning Bible expositions were set around the faithfulness of Daniel in the face of persecution. These were particularly challenging in the light of the many real and disturbing testimonies of daily life from many of the representatives of today's persecuted church.

Afternoons were taken up with international lectures and seminars. Of particular note were the excellent addresses from Professor John Wyatt on ethical issues surrounding the beginning and end of life as well as the biblical basis of humanity. Dr Trevor Stammers provided thought provoking material regarding human sexuality.

The proceedings attracted the attention of several well-known local political figures who gave speeches at some of the many social events around the city. These included the vice-president of Taiwan and her entourage, the minister for health and the foreign affairs minister. We were especially encouraged by a remark of the vice-president. She told how she had been very impressed by the Christian ethos of humility and service.

I was deeply challenged by the resolution and bravery of delegates from places where Christians are persecuted for their faith. We in Britain, despite freedom to proclaim the Gospel, can at times be anaemic in our witness. We do not have the threat of secret police invading our meeting like those in Beijing. Nor do we live with the fear of losing our jobs on account of our faith like so many of our other brothers and sisters around the world.

It is often through spending time with such people that we understand what Jesus meant when he said that faith as small as a mustard seed could move mountains (Luke 17:6).

The next ICMDA World Congress will be held in Darling Harbour in Sydney, 2006. Put the date in your diary now!

Liz Croton is a Senior House Officer in Birmingham