Winds of Change in the Middle East

Spring 2011
On 17 December 2010, 26-year-old Tunisian vegetable seller Mohammed Bouazizi set himself on fire in front of his regional government headquarters after a policewoman confiscated his cart. Within 28 days, the resulting waves of protest had forced the President of Tunisia, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, to resign after 23 years in power. Thus began a ‘people’s uprising’ that blew through the Middle East and North Africa like a tornado, and has been linked by some observers to protests in every inhabited continent outside Australia.

It was when the powerful Mubarak regime in Egypt was toppled on 11 February that the world really started to take notice – hailing the push for democratic reform as a new awakening for the Arab world. But as I began researching this issue of Checkpoint around that time, I noticed that many in the Christian world remained far more cautious.

Sure enough, this caution has proved justified. In many Arab nations the revolutionary movement has stalled, or been repressed by existing regimes. And the passionate young reformers who have begun using the turmoil for their own ends, which could mean less freedom than ever – particularly for the powerless Christian minority. (We’ve tried to sum up the situation for you on our lift-out map.)

Yet even among Christians there is a wide range of opinions about the impact of these events. But as John Thew asserts on pp 4–5, “none of world history is out of God’s control”. In Egypt, the Lord has been working behind the scenes for years, through growing prayer movements and the increasing availability of his word. God’s people joined the protests, ministered to the injured, and invited Muslims to join them in prayer and worship. The cross and crescent flag (pictured on pp 6–7) became a symbol of a potential unity between the two faiths.

Amid reports of growing violence and unrest, God’s plans remain unchanged. Constitutional reform could mean less discrimination towards Christians in this region; some believers even occupy positions of power in transitional governments.

The current political changes present new challenges . . . and with them, new opportunities. They may not be there forever – will you seize the opportunity God is offering right now to serve in the Muslim world?
Protest and celebration in Tahrir Square, Cairo, 18 February (iStockphoto)
Federal Secretary John Thew writes:

Like the weather, changing day to day are the winds of change blowing through the Middle East. The December 2010 ‘people’s revolt’ in Tunisia quickly engulfed the Middle East, spreading to Egypt and back to Libya, then on to Syria, Yemen and the Gulf States.

The first stirrings of protest were hailed, locally and internationally, as a breakthrough for democracy. But quickly the so-called ‘Arab Spring’ turned to an opportunistic thaw for radical Islamist groups seeking influence and power; then to a ‘winter of discontent’ for minority groups, especially Christians.

Jonathan Aitken (American Spectator, June 2011) wrote: “The early signs of tolerance were hopeful. One of the most moving aspects of the crowds in Tahrir Square [Cairo] was that Christians and Muslims protested alongside each other in unity . . . but it was too good to last.”

On 8 April, in Egypt, Anglican Bishop Mouneer Anis described “a climate of uncertainty, fear, and apprehension” among the Christian Copts who make up 10% of the population. On 19 May, known and trusted source RA said: “In my 30 years of living here [Cairo], I have never felt so much tension and insecurity. Almost daily we hear of break-ins, arson, killings [against Christians], which almost never used to happen in Cairo.”

Eighty per cent of Iraqi Christians have emigrated under pressure and intimidation that can only be described as slow ethnic cleansing. “Christianity in Iraq is under vicious attack”, says Andrew White, Vicar of St George’s Baghdad. “Last year alone 93 members of my congregations were killed. The threat is particularly great for those who convert to Christianity. I baptised 13 adults secretly last year. Eleven of them were dead within a week.”

Immediately obvious is local discontent with dictatorial rule by the various national leaders. Of course, these regimes were largely legitimised with the transfer of territories following World War Two. Ever since then they have been supported (with mixed feelings) by Western powers eager to secure their own interests in the region, including oil and military bases.

The wildfire spread of the uprisings has been fuelled by globalised communications, the Internet and the social media including SMS, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. Many of the young people using these media are under-employed and able to mobilise instantly. As James Petras, former Professor of Sociology at Binghamton University, New York, explained (3 March): “most of the Arab economies where the revolts are taking place are based on ‘rents’ from oil, gas, minerals and tourism”. These rent-based economies generate great wealth but provide few productive jobs.

Other factors play a major though hard-to-quantify role in the tensions. Traditional Middle Eastern tribal rivalries

The Arab Spring: Major Causes

The Arab world has seen a population explosion – 20% of people are aged 15 to 24 – but declining productivity and the need to import more and more food (at rising prices) have led to high youth unemployment. Some Arab nations are very poor, while in many oil-rich nations there is a wide gap between the haves and the have-nots.

Also significant is the rise of radical Islam, seen as the solution to the theological problem of Islam’s lack of success in the modern world. But Muslim leaders cannot agree on how Christians and other minorities (including minority Muslims) should be treated in these increasingly Islamised States.

Islamisation and the rule of long-standing dictators have led to entrenched corruption and political repression. Yet they have also given more recently established nations a sense of identity, now under threat.
An Egyptian woman walks past the burnt-out headquarters of President Mubarak’s party on 12 February, the day after his resignation.

For the first time, the monopoly of communications by some regimes has been broken by **modern media technology**. Ordinary people have a new awareness of how good things are elsewhere, especially in the West, and a new ability to share information rapidly.

In most cases, this initial push for democracy is threatened by **existing tribal, religious and regional conflicts**. As former regimes are overturned or destabilised, the power vacuum may be filled by radical Islamists, who are far better organised than the reformers. People want democracy – but can it coexist with radical Islam?

**Western involvement** has been inconsistent and often misguided and has frequently made things worse.

Each of these nations has a different political system and a different ethnic and religious mix, and in each of them this ‘people’s uprising’ has taken a **different form**. (See our lift-out map.)

No powers on earth should imagine that they are self-sufficient, or answerable only to themselves (Isaiah 45:11–12), for God has an eternal plan, of which they are part (Psalm 33:11)! God’s plan comes to fruit through Jesus (Ephesians 1:9–10), who is the apex of his eternal purposes, and who, in God’s good timing, will pull everything together (Romans 11:36), to declare unambiguously to the world the glory of the God.

Many, even faithful Christians, find this hard to accept, but take heart – everything that is happening now is part of God’s work of preparing the world for the final day of judgment, and the revelation that Jesus is the Lord of all.

**How CMS responds**

As God’s people, redeemed, restored, commissioned, but far from perfect, we continue to listen to God’s words of grace and love and commission towards the world.

Here in the CMS office, we watch and pray, as you do. We use all our contacts and information to make wise decisions. We are not about to withdraw our mission personnel from the hotspots of the world. Indeed, it is often in such times of turmoil that many people see with new clarity the true nature of the human dilemma, and look to Christians for the hope that is within them.

As for Christian partners who are feeling the heat of the winds of change, we want to assure them that the members of the CMS family are brothers and sisters who sympathise, who support and who will take every opportunity to express our trust in God’s grace as we **PRAY, CARE, GIVE and GO**.
For decades, the region’s ‘waves’ all seemed to roll in one direction. The sea of authoritarianism appeared to be calm. But suddenly a cross-current came as if from nowhere!

Using the Internet, thousands of young people began protesting, and within days were joined by millions! ‘Down with the regime!’

The dictators have been rowing hard to get back to safety. While some gave up, others are still trying to stem the tide.

Where is the Arab world drifting?

As I have thought about the events of this year in Egypt and throughout the Middle East, I’ve been reminded of this incident at sea.

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Where is the Arab world drifting?

Right now, Egypt and much of the region is drifting. Many Christians here, as well as some analysts, predict a takeover by Islamist groups.

While it is undoubtedly the case that the collapse of the old order has given more freedom for these groups to operate in public, the new winds blowing across the Arab world are bearing the flag of freedom, not that of fundamentalism.

Of course, it is not easy to predict the course these countries will take. Personally, I am confident that Egypt will eventually end up on a much safer shore than the one it started from.

The tide is turning

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Christians in this part of the world fear the uncertainty more than others.

Caught in the currents

Some years ago I got into a rubber raft on one of Egypt’s lovely beaches and went out into the Mediterranean. Because the waves were small and the breeze was gentle, I was very confident that my rowing ability could get me back to shore.

But suddenly I found myself in a strange situation: waves were now coming from two different directions! I decided to row back to shore to rejoin my family, but I was being pulled away! The current had suddenly changed direction and I could not resist it.

Fortunately I was able to drift with the new current to the other side of the bay. A happy ending, despite the terrible anxiety of my wife!

Caught in the currents of political change

As I have thought about the events of this year in Egypt and throughout the Middle East, I’ve been reminded of this incident at sea.
They remind me of my wife as she anxiously waited for her husband to emerge from the sea!

There have been attacks against churches, but for the most part the Egyptian revolution has brought Christians and Muslims together. There are cross-currents of sentiment among Christians in the region. While some are more intent on emigration than ever before, others have been energised to become involved in ministry as well as in social and political action. Over all we are sensing a new hunger in people, and more openness to testify to our wonderful Lord and Saviour.

We at the Alexandria School of Theology have encouraged our students to take advantage of new open doors and participate in the remaking of Egypt. On 16 July we had the joy of graduating our third group of Diploma and Bachelor’s students, 29 in total, including two Sudanese brothers. In another significant development, our board recently gave us approval to offer an unprecedented program for non-Christian inquirers!

**Calming the waters with prayer**

We appreciate the support and prayers of the CMS Australia family at this crucial time in our history. Here are some specifics to pray for . . .

**PRAY**

- Pray for all our teachers to be faithful examples of Christlikeness to our students as well as effective communicators.
- Pray for our students and graduates to grow in the knowledge of God and in ministerial effectiveness.
- Pray that the new openness in the region will only increase, and lead to many, many conversions as well as to the planting of new congregations.
- Pray for a relatively easy transition to democracy in Egypt and the rest of the Arab world.
A CMS affiliate writes:

The chain of uprisings that we have seen right across the Middle East and North Africa has been seen generally as a positive thing in the Western media and around the world.

One of the main reasons for this is that these uprisings have been generally initiated by the people – and against regimes that are not democratic, have been in power for a long time, and some of which pass the presidency down from father to son like a monarchy.

Many of us long to cry out for democracy with these people, but as we have seen in the tragedy of what has happened to Iraq’s Christian population, things aren’t so straightforward. The Christian minority in the Middle East and North Africa is very vulnerable. In this time of political upheaval we must be even more committed and earnest in prayer for the people in general, and for Christian believers right across the region.

The lesson of Iraq

With the removal of Saddam Hussein in Iraq we saw the rising up of radical Islam, along with the sectarian conflict that has resulted in horrific violence against the population in general, particularly the Christian minority. Since 2003, more than a third of the Christian population in Iraq has left and another third has fled to the northern part of the country.

I have seen first-hand how the rise of radical Islam in Iraq has devastated the Christians of that country and affected the morale of Christians right through the region. Church leaders have voiced their concerns at the exodus of Christians from the region. Many of the local believers have shared with me their fear that the violence in Iraq and the attacks against Christians there will spread right across the Middle East and beyond.

Worsening fears

What is happening now is making them even more nervous. Attacks on Coptic Christians in Egypt, which have been escalating for a few years now, have increased even more in the months since the fall of Egypt’s regime. There are fears about what will happen if fundamentalist groups gain political control come the elections in September.

One of the countries in turmoil at the time of writing has been described by Barnabas Fund in recent times as the last haven of safety for Christians in the Middle East. Again, there are great fears as to what will happen to the minority peoples in this country if the regime falls. Who will take over? What will happen to the large number of Iraqi Christians sheltering in this country?

Our response

It is a difficult and uncertain time for Christians in this region. But we know that God’s great love for them, and the knowledge that they belong to him, can cast out their fear and give them peace and courage in the face of uncertainty.
“Please pray FOR our brothers and sisters in Jesus, and pray WITH them for God’s Holy Spirit to bring about his will and purposes for all the people and nations of this region.”
Grant Lock and his wife Janna served with CMS for 24 years in Pakistan and Afghanistan. In this edited extract from his autobiography Shoot Me First – due out in October – Grant reminds us that the political troubles in the Middle East started long before the Arab Spring . . .

Islamabad, 2002

“My name is Wurzan, and I come from Iraq.”

Over lunch he tells us his story. “I am a Kurd from Halabja, the town that Saddam Hussein gassed last year.”

“Is that why you left Iraq?”

“No! The main reason was that I asked too many questions.”

“What about?”

“About life and about our religion. My father is a teacher and a very religious Muslim, but he couldn’t answer them.” Wurzan reaches hungrily for his fourth piece of naan. “My father took me to the local religious leaders, the Maulvis. They were not happy. They told me that it is wrong to ask questions about our holy religion. It shows a lack of faith. Only unbelievers ask questions. On the way home my father told me that I had embarrassed him and dishonoured him. ‘Only kafirs ask questions,’ he said.”

I take up our guest’s concern. “I’ve often wondered why people can’t ask questions in Islam, Wurzan. It claims to have the answers for life, yet it seems oversensitive about people wanting to scrutinise it. And it’s particularly sensitive if a Muslim investigates another religious system. That isn’t the sign of a confident religion; it’s a sign of insecurity and control.”

Wurzan nods. “Young people are told to be quiet and just accept everything. But in the university, my lecturer encouraged us to explore and evaluate.”

“What university studies did you complete?” Janna asks.

He sets his jaw. “They wouldn’t let me finish. They threw me in jail and made sure I stayed there during the final examinations.”

“But why?”

“I was a student of law and I was asking questions about human rights in our country.”

I can’t help but admire the pluckiness of this young Iraqi intellectual.

“So tell me, Wurzan,” Janna asks, “how did you get out of jail?”

“My relatives arranged it, but I was frightened. I knew I would always be watched. If Saddam could kill five thousand Kurds with gas, he could easily deal with me.”

“So you got out.”

He nods. “I came via Iran, and I have already been to the United Nations here to apply for asylum in a Western country.”

I can see that this young refugee doesn’t let the grass grow under his feet. “Well, Wurzan, we wish you well in the West. At least you’ll be able to ask questions more freely.”

“Thank you, Sir.”

“But there is one question that many people in the West are asking, and it’s a question Muslims never ask.”

He raises an eyebrow. “And what is that?”

“Is there intelligence behind everything, an intelligent creator?”

He gives half a laugh. “But anyone can see that there is creative intelligence behind everything. Why don’t they accept that in the West?”

“That’s easy. It’s because they might have to ask the next two questions.”

“And what are they?”

“If there is an intelligent creator, what is that creator like? And secondly, where do I fit in?”

Find out more about Shoot Me First at www.shootmefirst.com. You can even sign up to be notified when the book is available for purchase.
Wednesday 31 August brings to a close 28 memorable years of CMS service for Faith Blake – as a missionary, and as a staff member of her branch and of CMS-Australia.

Faith’s CMS journey began when she was accepted as a missionary in 1983. The next year she left for Tanzania, and after six months of language learning she arrived in the Anglican Diocese of Victoria Nyanza, to teach Maths at Mwanza Secondary School. Despite a six-day teaching load, she took every opportunity to be involved in the Christian student group UKWATA.

In fact, after her second Home Assignment in 1991, she served full-time with both UKWATA and in Christian Education with the Diocese. Through camps, seminars and weekly Bible studies, she saw many come to know Christ or grow stronger in their faith.

Sadly, this tour of Tanzania was cut short when Faith’s mother Gloria became ill and Faith took extended leave to nurse her. In late 1993 she joined the staff of CMS-NSW in a senior position that involved responsibility for missionary deputations, short-term workers and youth and children’s ministry.

Gloria died in 1998, and Faith’s thoughts began to turn back to Tanzania. But in 2001, just before she began missionary training, a vacancy arose in the CMS Australia office for the position of Mission Personnel Secretary. This huge role involved the pastoral care of all CMS workers—halved in 2005 when Faith was joined by Peter Blowes. In the intervening years, Faith has travelled countless kilometres on missionary visits, taken phone calls from personnel at all hours of the day and night, and helped hundreds find positions serving cross-culturally with CMS.

Along the way Faith has made lifelong friends wherever she goes. Since she announced her retirement tributes have poured into the CMS office.

Faith at Msalato College in July (see below)

Bishop Mwita Akiri of Tarime, Tanzania, summed up what many of us feel about Faith when he wrote: “Yours have been years of dedicated service to the world Church … You empathised and sympathised, put yourself in the shoes of local leaders while also standing firm on policy issues. Asante. Amani ya Bwana ikae nawe daima. (Farewell. May the peace of the Lord be with you forever.)”

Sunday 11 July was deacon ordination day in the Diocese of Mara, Tanzania. The 18 ordinands included CMS missionaries Helen Hoskins, Jono Vink and Matthew Archer, plus Helen’s best friend and long-standing colleague Noadia. As the ordinands stood before the congregation in Musoma Cathedral, along with spouses including Amy Vink and Samantha Archer, Bishop Hilkiah Omindo Deya said he wanted to ordain these missionaries alongside their Tanzanian colleagues because they were not just an add-on from outside, but an integral part of the ministry and leadership of the Diocese.

Sunday 18 July was the celebration of 50 years of operations for Msalato Theological College. Now part of St John’s University of Tanzania, Msalato remains one of the key Anglican theological training colleges in Tanzania. Msalato leaders paid tribute to CMS, expressing appreciation for founding missionaries including Ken and Gloria Short, Peter and Marie Dawson and Kevin and Dorothy Engel, and for past and present teaching staff at the College.

The preacher on both occasions was Federal Secretary John Thew, on his last trip to Tanzania before retirement. On both occasions he spoke principally on leadership, noting the weighty role of God-glorifying leadership in the Church and the community, and the importance of knowing and obeying the scriptures. At Msalato, he cited the College’s founding vision statement – Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the Word of God (2 Timothy 2:15). He noted that the evidence of Msalato’s role in this was before him – more than 200 church leaders, all graduates of Msalato.
NEW STAFF AT ST ANDREW’S HALL

Following Judith Calf’s appointment as Mission Personnel Secretary, the CMS-Australia Development and Training Team is delighted to announce the following:

From 1 July 2011, Charlie Fletcher (former missionary in Mexico) has been serving two days a week at CMS’s training college St Andrew’s Hall, developing a growing partnership with Ridley Melbourne, where he is Dean of Global Missions three days a week.

We are thankful to God for his timing in all of this and for providing the CMS Development and Training team with such outstanding people.

John Thew, CMS Federal Secretary

CMS-WA MISSIONARY AWARENESS CONFERENCE 2011

On 18 June CMS-WA held its annual Missionary Awareness Conference – the equivalent of CMS summer conferences, but held for one day, in winter! The theme for 2011 was Neighbours: Crossing the Street to Cross the World. Paul Whitfield (City Bible Forum) helped us explore Luke 10:25–37, looking at the parable of the lost son as it applies to missional living. John Thew (CMS-A) spoke on the role of Christians in mission, both locally and cross-culturally. Over the course of the day, other practical tips for loving our neighbours with the good news of Jesus were presented. The Mustard Seed Effect was also launched (find out more at www.cms.org.au/mustardseed).

We were encouraged by the diversity of ages and backgrounds among those present. Highlights included writing letters to our link missionaries (subsequently well received), and spending time in prayer. The day closed with a personal farewell to John Thew as he prepares to retire, and a presentation to Ken Frewer (former CMS-WA General Secretary) of the original deed to the CMS-WA house.

Peter Schendzielorz, CMS-WA Education and Training Officer

DAY 29 – CMS DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

Klaus & Judith Hickel, missionaries in training from Course 1, 2011, give thanks for the birth of a third son, Max Christian, on 21 April.

Missionaries in training, Course 2, 2011:

Andrew & Claire Livingstone (VIC)
Location to be decided

Shane & Naomi Rubie (SA/NT)
Thomas (13/9/00), Oliver (21/12/01), Lucy (21/4/05), Max (26/4/07)
Planning to serve in Ethiopia

DAY 31 – BRANCH SUPPORT MINISTRIES

The Medical Mission Auxiliary (MMA) has officially changed its name to Medical Mission Aid. Please continue to pray for MMA’s ministry in some of the world’s poorest countries.

QUICK CONTACTS

For security reasons, the NSW & ACT branch and the CMS-Australia Office have both changed their postal address. The new addresses are:

CMS-NSW & ACT
PO Box 21326, World Square NSW 2002

CMS-Australia
PO Box 20095, World Square NSW 2002

PRAYER DIARY UPDATES

DAY 17 – TANZANIA
Kees & Cindy Bootsma have left Tabora Diocese and are now serving at St Philip’s Theological College, Kongwa. Their new address is:
c/– St Philip’s Theological College
SLP 26 Kongwa, Tanzania

DAY 18 – SOUTH AFRICA
Mark & Carol Grieve (now on Final Home Assignment) are praising God for their baby girl Zoe, whom they adopted from an orphanage in March.

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Give thanks for John Stott

John R W Stott CBE, the former Rector of All Souls Church, Langham Place, London, and one of the most significant Christian leaders of the 20th century, died on 27 July aged 90. John Stott’s remarkable ministry spanned the second half of the 20th century, while in his 80s he was making an impact on the 21st. His leadership of the evangelical movement helped it become the fastest growing section of global Christianity.

Alongside Billy Graham, John Stott was a significant leader of the Lausanne Movement, which promotes worldwide Christian evangelism. He largely crafted its two major documents, the Lausanne Covenant (1974) and the Manila Manifesto (1989). His support for world mission saw him appear as guest Bible speaker at CMS-Australia summer conferences in 1965, 1971, 1976 and 1986.

He led the renaissance of biblical expository preaching throughout the evangelical world and was the author of some 50 books. “His books have challenged and nourished millions of Christians into a balanced and thinking biblical faith,” said Chris Wright, Langham Partnership International Director. “His legacy through the global impact of the two organisations that he founded, Langham Partnership International and the London Institute of Contemporary Christianity, is incalculable . . . He was, for all of us who knew him, a walking embodiment of the simple beauty of Jesus, whom he loved above all else.”

John Stott asked that donations following his death be given to Langham Partnership, which seeks to raise the standards of biblical teaching and preaching around the world. The list of movements and institutions he strengthened can be found in the biographical pages at www.langhampartnership.org and further information at the memorial website www.johnstottmemorial.org.

With great thanks to Langham Partnership

Give thanks for Marion Chittleborough

Marion grew up in the United Kingdom, and arrived in Tanzania in 1953 to serve with the Diocese of Central Tanganyika. Three years later, she married Gordon Chittleborough, a South Australian who had been serving in Tanzania since 1938 (and as a CMS missionary from 1947).

The Chittleboroughs took study leave in London between 1958 and 1962 so Gordon could complete a Bachelor of Divinity, and on returning to Tanzania they settled in Kigoma and helped set up the Diocese of Western Tanganyika (1966). Later (1970) they were involved in the separation of the new Province of Tanzania from the Province of Kenya. From 1972 to 1977 they had pastoral charge of Christ Church Arusha, then from 1978 to 1980 served in Kenya, at the Nairobi Language and Orientation School.

Gordon had already begun writing Swahili Bible commentaries, and continued this ministry when they resettled permanently in the United Kingdom in 1980. He died in 2002, and Marion continued living in Blackheath, London, until her death on 12 July after four years of battling cancer. “She has fought the good fight and run the race”, write her daughters Frances, Gwyneth and Rowena. “She can now receive the crown of righteousness that awaits her in heaven.” Please keep them and other family members in your prayers.

Who is CMS?

CMS is a fellowship of God’s people committed to the glory of God and the proclamation of the gospel throughout the world. Our vision is to see God’s Church growing in all the world as lives and communities are transformed by Christ. CMS has about 200 missionaries serving long-term in more than 35 countries.

How can you be involved?

You can be involved by doing one or more of the following:

- **PRAY** for the extension of God’s kingdom through informed prayer for missionaries and receiving communities.
- **CARE** for our missionaries and the communities in which they serve in practical ways.
- **GIVE** money so that the work of proclaiming Jesus can continue.

(Missionary name/s)

Make a commitment to get more involved in PRAYING, CARING or GIVING today! Tick one (or more) of the boxes above and we’ll send you more information.

You may also be considering another option:

- **GO.** If you want to talk to someone about the possibility of going as a missionary, please contact your branch (see p 2).

Feedback

We would love to receive your feedback on this edition of Checkpoint. Write this below or email us at checkpoint@cms.org.au

Please complete your details overleaf and send your completed response form to your branch (see p 2 for contact details).