

UNSEEN FACES – UNHEARD VOICES
LIVING WITHOUT JUSTICE

FOREWORD

The Hon. Michael Kirby AC CMG *

When I was approaching the ripe old age of 30, my new-found partner, Johan, persuaded me to join in an overland drive to England. Although most Australians at that time thought that Asia was a place to fly over and avoid, a number of young Australians were beginning to explore the countries around us.

Our journey took us through Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran before we reached the edges of Europe. It was an amazing experience. Mostly because of the people we met. We took countless photographs. Even today, when we look at them, we remember the mountains and temples; but most of all, the people who showed us interest and kindness and we remember our younger selves. This experience reinforced the lesson of the universality of human beings, the confined space of our planet, and the common challenges (economic, social, religious and legal) that we saw. This book by Livingston Armytage is specially arresting for us because it helps recreate the mood and feelings of such a journey. And the challenges that have grown more difficult in many places in the intervening years.

Livingston Armytage is an Australian lawyer who has spent the last 25 years working to promote justice in Asia and the Pacific. His encounters

with our surrounding countries have not been made as a tourist, in the modest but habitable environment of a Volkswagen Kombi van. They have occurred in projects promoting justice and law reform, sponsored by the United Nations, the World Bank, the Australian Government, its agencies and international civil society organisations. I first met the author in the 1990s, when my overland trip was 20 years in the past. He was endeavouring to introduce continuing education for serving judges. I was by then the President of the Court of Appeal of New South Wales. He faced a measure of opposition to his plans. But he is persistent, in a charming way. Progress was his reward.

Since those early days, he has spent much of his time urging reform in legal and administrative institutions in our region. Occasionally, we would meet and sometimes work together to fulfil the missions in which he was engaged. Nowadays, most of his time is spent in Pakistan, Myanmar (Burma) and the Pacific Islands.

Just as over the intervening years I have written hundreds of judicial opinions and forewords like this, Livingston has prepared an equal number of technical reports urging change in unjust, discriminatory and prejudicial laws and policies in the countries of his scrutiny. As he has explained it to me, he feared that many of his worthy reports remained unread. Certainly, many essential changes that he urged were unaccomplished. It was for this reason that he has turned from the pen and laptop to the camera. The subjects of his photographic studies can, in this way, tell their own stories by vivid images that capture them in the truth of their lives.

It is a cliché to say that ‘a picture is worth a thousand words’. Yet the vivid images in this book allow the subjects of the photographs to communicate some of their stories. They do not speak. But the pictures from the lives of ordinary people whom Livingston has photographed become a kind of tool for advocacy and change. The images speak to us, the viewers, who will never read the learned technical reports. They display injustices that persist in most human societies. They show life often as a misery, especially for the poor. They reveal the cruelty and injustice that persist not all that far from our comfortable homes. Where the technical reports could not produce action, perhaps these photographic images will affect the minds and feelings of those who see them.

The overland journeys that my partner and I took in 1970 and 1974 may have been off the beaten track to some extent. But Livingston Armytage’s photographs push the lens still further off that track. These pictures demand each one of us to contemplate how we can address poverty and misery on our planet more quickly and effectively. For billions of human beings, in the here and now, this is the reality for which the author’s work provides a call to action.

The subjects may be silent. But their circumstances speak volumes. They speak to us in quiet inner voices that tell of the burdens of war, the horrors of genocide, the instability of revolutions and the shackles of crime and injustice beyond the reach of law.

I congratulate Livingston Armytage for his unceasing efforts to contribute to a better world.

Where Livingston's written reports may have been neglected, his outstanding photography and imagery of the human condition may contribute more quickly to the urgency of change.

* Justice of the High Court of Australia (1996-2009); President of the Court of Appeal of NSW (1984-96); UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Human Rights in Cambodia (1993-6); President of the International Commission of Jurists (1995-8); Chair of the UN Commission of Inquiry on North Korea (2013-14).