



Initiatives of Change

Caux, Monday, 12th August 2002

Dear friends,

My greetings last week from a sunny Caux seem misplaced. It has been cold and wet with below-seasonal temperatures, as they say dryly (haha!) in the weather forecasts. I brought two pairs of smart shorts with me for the summer season here, and I've not worn them once. It seems that autumn is already upon us, with Caux wrapped in cloud. And here we are, on the brink of the last conference.

As ever, our hearts and minds are as full as the house has been at the end of the week on 'Peace-building initiatives' initiated by the *Agenda for Reconciliation* programme. The rich panorama of pain and suffering, and of faith and hope-giving initiatives... the wife of a Sudanese guerrilla leader talks of her exile, of 8 months together as a family in 19 years, and the challenge on bringing up of bringing up four children 'without sowing the seeds of hate in their hearts'. A Somali and a Palestinian woman speak, both beautiful, in superb national dress, and there's a terrible contrast between their beauty and the pain of their stories; the latter calls for 'a just peace, with honour and dignity'. 'When I heard of *Initiatives of Change*, a vision started to grow in my mind and my heart,' she says. A Palestinian civil engineer from Jerusalem plays the piano for a peaceful interlude in the meeting on 'Answering anger, mistrust and fear'.

A Rwandan exile in Canada talks of the mimetic copying of the evil we experience, but then return to those who hurt us – 'but with interest'. He gives us a word in his own language for raising and straightening the bent, and another word for becoming full, as persons, *together*. Another African speaks of UNICEF's efforts to disarm child-soldiers. The Caux Scholars invite us to write down on sheets of coloured paper our dreams for this time together, and they're posted up in a rainbow of hopes next to the hall.

The Caux Lecture of Aaron Lazare, Chancellor of the University of Massachusetts medical school, (5th largest in the USA) marked not just the week but also the summer, with his challenge: 'Apology is the only cure for a humiliation'. Rajmohan Gandhi suggested in his vote of thanks that there might be fewer apologies in Caux as a result, since we would weigh the weight of the words more, and use them more carefully! In a session on 'Towards partnership between Islamic and Western cultures', the Emir of Kano in Nigeria spoke of 'the cloud of insecurity', and the mutual prejudices from the past. Anatoly Krassikov, President in Russia for the International Association for Religious Freedom, noted, 'If we say that we're right and everyone else is wrong, then we're treated as mad. But if we replace the "I am right" with "my country" or "my religion", we find wide support.' He challenged each person to work within his or her own community. Bryan Hamlin, from Boston, spoke of 'the spirit of Caux' as an essential ingredient in this process. 'Nations that are open will flourish, nations that are closed will not,' he warned. Cornelio Sommaruga concluded that international humanitarian law must be respected, and that as the Geneva Spiritual Appeal of 24th October 1999 (of which he is a signatory) said, religions must not be used to justify conflicts. The Appeal is going to be re-launched on September 11th.

A seminar with former British diplomat Archie Mackenzie, on his new book *Faith in Diplomacy*, underlined the importance of the simple idea that God has a plan, and that listening in silence to seek God's will 'offers a different way of making decisions'. 'I've kept it up for 68 years now, and it works,' he said. He likened it to the wake of a ship. If you stand at the prow, and look ahead, the course is anything but clear, but go to the stern and look back, and you can see a furrow. It was a dangerous profession – five close friends and colleagues had been assassinated. But he looked back with gratitude. 'Never write anyone off,' he concluded.



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There have been, as so often, a host of difficult choices, with seminars offered by the Caux Scholars, by the *Gente que Avanza* group from Latin America, by young Israelis and Palestinians, on Northern Ireland and Sierra Leone, and on 'lessons learned in peace-building'. An American-born woman moved us all with her personal story of her work to help her people from Pakistan and Afghanistan. 'I borrowed my hope from the women and children of Afghanistan,' she said.

The now-traditional variety evening offered us the most convincing Maori 'haka' war dance that I've ever seen, from a white New Zealander. There were classical piano duets, classical Egyptian music, that had everyone clapping, and singing along. Angola, Australia, South Africa...

Africa has been very present through this week, with a small group of Angolans meeting in private to advance the timid signs of hope for their long-suffering nation, and there has been the Great Lakes round table, with 50 participants from Congo, Burundi and Rwanda. There has been a sense of history in the making, of personal decisions that may have far-reaching consequences. The cabinet minister serving an enemy at breakfast, and getting a new understanding of his calling to serve; two men from opposite sides driving down to Geneva together, talking all the way of what they can do together to bring peace. One of the participants walked up the mountain behind Caux, and was stirred to see the way the wild flowers grow out of the rock; flowers are growing out of the rock of our hardened hearts, he said.

The conference on 'Peace-building initiatives' closed yesterday. Giovanni Bersani, from Italy, a long-time member of the European Parliament, and one of the architects of a more open policy towards the developing world, spoke before leaving. He had been coming to Caux for 18 years, he said, thanking the place for opening his heart and mind to so many people and situations. 'You have touched me. I have experienced miracles of peace here,' he said, 'this is a special place to change hearts. It is possible to overcome the obstacles in the most delicate situations.' A Muslim Imam referred back to Frank Buchman's challenge 'you cannot build Europe without the Germans', and said 'We cannot build peace without the Jews.'

'The spiritual factor in secular society' has taken us into two intense days, with more than 100 participants working mainly in smaller groups. I hope that I'll be able to say more after our closing meeting this afternoon, but we were 200 in the bay window of the Great Hall yesterday for an unforgettable inter-faith celebration (see the enclosed text). Two of those taking part first came to Caux for the open day at the start of the summer. One, a Latin American by origin, is bowled over to find people talking deeply about their beliefs. They are only two of more who have come back, for a day or longer. Then tomorrow, another change-over, and in the afternoon we're into the final session on 'Human security in a changing world'.

We've also been working on the programme for Caux 2003, and have produced a draft. Many very new to Caux were contributing their ideas. We meet in Tirley Garth, 24-29 October, when we will also begin to think for Caux 2004 already!

Thanks for the feedback and the expressions of gratitude for these letters. I'd like to thank all the others, whose names don't figure on the bottom of this letter, who make them possible.

Andrew Stallybrass