



Initiatives of Change

Caux, Saturday 9th August 2003

Dear friends,

Peace-building initiatives now lies behind us, and there's just the last home straight ahead with the second *Agenda for Reconciliation* conference – *Conflict prevention through human security* – starting on Tuesday. And the gap has not been all quiet and rest! Saturday was the open day, or rather the half-day open afternoon, announced in the local and regional press, and at the start of the summer in the list of public lectures and events that went to every home. So we girded up our loins, and waited without knowing how many would respond. This is one of my favourite happenings in Caux – welcoming the curious from the public, our neighbours. They came this year by dozens rather than hundreds, but many excellent touches. And the gap also sees the annual meeting of the 'International Association' of IC legal bodies and member delegates.

It has been a week that touched all our hearts with the sufferings of so many peoples and parts of the world, of this strange, paradoxical tension between the peace of this place and the horrors that many bring with them. And we've been deeply stirred by the courage and passion of so many working for a different tomorrow, working for initiatives of change – in the Middle East, in Africa, in Papua. The morning meetings offered three or four people the chance to tell their stories in greater depth, and then in the afternoons, there have been multiple-choice workshops and seminars. A highlight for me was an afternoon with Anne Frank's cousin. Anne Frank was a Jewish girl, who was killed in World War II, but who left a diary that is a best seller around the world – 30 million copies sold, and translated into 70 languages! He talked of his work to continue her fight against hate, racism and anti-Semitism, as a baby burbled in the background (visit their Web site: <http://www.annefrank.ch/e/>).

A Jordanian General talks of his wars with Israel, being wounded and taken prisoner, and then of his work for peace and reconciliation. The peacemakers need protection – they risk losing their jobs and worse in the current conflict. I find that I am close to tears in my translation booth as I interpret for Africans speaking with immense conviction of their work and commitment. 'Where do you get your passion?' one was asked from the floor of the hall, and she replied by talking of the mass grave with some 50,000 bodies being opened up near her home. 'I owe it to them, as a fellow human being on earth,' she said. Rajmohan Gandhi describes himself as 'a persevering if usually failing peace-maker', and talks of the need for the peacemaker to confront tough establishments. A senior person from Zaïre talks of being taken hostage shortly after his return from Caux last year, while on a peace-making mission, yet he has had a certainty of God's leading and protection, and the certainty that he was meant to go on with his work.

Six women spoke one morning on conflict transformation, including a young Palestinian mother from Jerusalem and an experienced Israeli activist. 'I promised two years ago here in Caux to do more, but I've not done enough,' the Israeli mother said. 'Don't believe all that you read,' she went on, 'none of the mothers want to send their sons and daughters to die. My son has been in prison five times for refusing to obey orders.' A Protestant nun shared with realism and depth from her experience of quiet and of listening in her community. An Australian gave the powerful story of the National Sorry Day Movement and its Journey of Healing, tackling the mistreatment of the Aboriginal peoples, and the government's refusal to acknowledge their pain. 'The victims do not forget,' John Bond said. 'There cannot be national reconciliation and healing without remembering.' An American with long experience as a diplomat and then as a peace activist and teacher said, 'The naïve are those who believe that you can bring peace without trust, by the old game of blame and counter-blame.' He gave voice to a humble, serving America that opened many hurting hearts. A Jew with dual Israeli and American citizenship spoke with deep feeling of the abuses of human rights that spring from fear, and the need of both of his countries for the love of others to draw them out of fear – a love that he'd experienced in



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Caux. The discussion between Israelis and Palestinians had been the deepest that he'd ever experienced.

A senior Palestinian educator gave a notable Caux Lecture. Professor Sari Nusseibeh, President of the Al-Quds University in Jerusalem, spoke of the start of a people's movement for peace in Israel and Palestine. Many of his people, he said, dreamed of going back both in space and in time to the pre-1948 world, before the creation of the State of Israel. He continued, 'We cannot control the past, but we can control the future, and we must focus our efforts there.' The leaders on both sides, he went on, had proved incapable of leading their peoples towards peace, and of tearing down the idols that stood in the way. 'Neither of our peoples walk this earth alone. Another group claims the same space, the same rocks and trees, the same history.'

The outlines of a two-state solution had long been clear, addressing the questions of settlements on the one hand, and the refugees right to return on the other, a shared capital in Jerusalem, and a special status for the holy sites. But the peoples – on both sides – were never really consulted on what they felt or wanted. So with an Israeli colleague (former Navy General and security chief Ami Ayalon), he had started a movement to collect signatures. In only a little over a month they had collected 60,000 and the number was going up all the time (visit their Web site: <http://www.hashd.org/english/index.htm>). 'We've had a lot of support, but we've had a lot of opposition too,' Nusseibeh said. They dreamt of being able to return to their respective leaders with a million signatures, and the plea, 'deliver us from fifty years of suffering, to a new dimension of sanity'.

Nusseibeh likened the many un-implemented United Nations resolutions to a drug or a tranquilliser given to his people to console them for their political and geographical losses. For him, the Palestinians could and should forego the right for the refugees to return, in favour of exercising another right: their right to freedom in their own state. 'In an ideal world,' he said, 'these rights would not conflict, but in the real world, we have to forego one in order to obtain the other.'

In continuing sun and heat, one day many went down the hill into the even greater heat on outings to the Federal Parliament in Bern, to the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum in Geneva, and to the tourist site of Gruyère.

Bev Appleton, an American singer/actor friend of Caux, gave us a magical evening with the African American singer Muriel Smith (played with great simplicity and authority by Shalimar Hickman-Jones). Muriel Smith had tried to use her artistry for healing, notably between the races in her own USA, and the healing power of music was a notable part of the week. Bev himself gave us an evening of lighter songs from great musicals. And there was the traditional variety evening, with Norwegian brothers of six and four both singing songs, a New Zealand Maori Haka, a Maltese protest song about the ecological damage caused by the construction of a desalination plant, an African action song by the children, and more music from the West Papuan group. In Negro spiritual mode, some of the vegetable team sang 'Nobody knows the tomatoes I've sliced', and the interpreters, from their cabins, brought howls of laughter with a joke/sketch about why the chicken crossed the road.

The Caux Scholars have been coming to the end of their course, and taking a full part in this conference. 'Conflict situations in the world have become real for me,' said one 'they have taken on a human face, they're real.' 'I've discovered here the love of God for everyone' said a young French Catholic businessman. 'I knew it with my head but here it touched me in my heart.' A Ugandan apologised to the Zairians present for his country's interference in theirs. 'I want to take the best of what I've learnt here in Caux to help Africa heal quickly' he said. A Papuan Church minister talked of their thirty-year struggle when they felt that no one was listening. 'Here I've really felt at home free to learn with you. You have become part of us' he said.

Over-heated greetings from Caux, Andrew Stallybrass