

Dear friends,

It's still dark, but lightening fast. Autumn has crept up on us while we were busy. And the long drought has at last come to an end – we'd almost forgotten what a slight chill in the air could feel like. Last night's final evening of dancing and music scheduled for outside, at the last minute had to be moved into the dining room. The tables were moved out of the bay window as the long-awaited rain started to fall and thunder echoed around and lightening flashed. Today we say thanks at the Protestant chapel with a last service and then have a final meeting with elements of evaluation of the whole summer, and also a conclusion of this last, rich week. Many friends are already leaving on their journeys home; the last minute rush is under way.

This last conference has seen numbers starting to fall, but *Conflict prevention through human security* has deeply stirred all those who came and took part with its exchanges of experiences from many difficult situations, and the formula of three or four people speaking and then enough time for questions from the floor and times of quiet to absorb all that we were hearing. This conference opened with an African choir singing, and their continent has been very present with hope-giving stories from the Kenya clean-election campaign, and the peace-building process under way over many months in Somalia. Governor-General Howard Cook from Jamaica sent a message to the opening – this is the first time in several years that he hasn't been here with a delegation.

At the start, we were invited to keep a journal, and at different points, we were given time to write down our thoughts and reflections. We started with considering our own fears and insecurities, and what it means to be a human being – a concept that's perhaps easier to understand than *human security*. A group from Canada took us deep into the question of indigenous rights, and the often-difficult relationship between the colonizer and the colonized cultures. 'I was angry. I didn't want to have anything to do with white people,' said a Native American filmmaker. 'But to have peace, I had to heal myself of my hatred.' She had resisted the word 'forgiveness' as a Christian concept but a traditional spiritual elder had talked to her about 'making your heart right with the Creator'. It had taken her thirteen years to reach 'the place where I see that it is our common humanity that matters'. 'It's worth risking a little insecurity,' responded a 'colonizer' Canadian. 'We almost never need to meet and face the colonized,' she noted, 'but personal and social healing comes from telling the often difficult truth.' We are not guilty for what our ancestors did, however unjust, but we can carry responsibility for the heritage of privilege that we have received, and we can accept the responsibility of working for a world where the rights of minorities are accepted, she said, expressing grief for all the waste.

An African American told how she came to Mountain House for the first time twenty years ago weary of the struggle for justice for herself and her people, and how she had experienced 'a different world, of compassion, care and love' where she had been treated with dignity and respect. She spoke of the earth as 'our house'. We should indeed be angry about hunger and exploitation she concluded, but love other people and forgive them.

One morning was spent looking at the social and economic cost of HIV/AIDS, with three women. A Naga working in this area told how her activism had been born in a total surrender to God. 'It's all about life not death' she concluded. An African woman doctor who had lost her husband to the disease and carried the virus herself and had come close to death told how she too had had an experience of God's leading, telling her to leave South Africa and return to her native Uganda, to work there in one of the hard-hit continents most telling 'success stories' of reducing infection rates. Yet another African expressed gratitude for all the help that her continent received, but pleaded for fair trade.

One theme running through the days was how can we care for and support those who have received a calling to make a difference. A young Japanese shared how he had started his own NGO to help Cambodia and fight against the scourge of anti-personnel landmines. He quoted Mother Theresa, saying



*Initiatives of Change*

---

that the opposite of love is indifference. How can we remove the landmines of indifference in our hearts, he asked? In Japan he had given 180 talks in 2 years, and after starting on his own, there were now 200 volunteers working with him. The conference has been a souk of human experience and commitment of those struggling with the terrible costs to humanity of mankind's inhumanity. The documentary film of the story of a Canadian General through the Rwandan genocide, *The Last Just Man*, deeply stirred all those who saw it. In the closing meeting, 24 participants spoke from the floor, to give their echoes of the week.

Twice I had to don earphones to listen to the translation from Serbian – a young woman involved in an NGO working for civic education and human rights, and a university lecturer who talked of fleeing reality into the worlds of books and music, but who had seen the need to remember the past and to forgive. 'I am not just transmitting knowledge to my students but understanding,' he said. I've learned more about the St. Egidio Community and their work, through the participation of two young people committed to this Catholic movement, and a group from a new NGO committee in Geneva on 'Spirituality, Values and Global Concerns' came to take part in a round table on the past, present and future of the United Nations. Countless questions and comments flowed from the audience, where all continents were represented. Retired ambassador Archie Mackenzie made a notable speech, and signed copies of his book *Faith in Diplomacy* afterwards.

'Human security' demands a dual approach of 'striving to abolish war itself' linked with 'practical measures to alleviate the sufferings of the victims' said Angelo Gnaedinger, the Director General of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in the stirring final Caux Lecture. Gnaedinger, a judge before joining the ICRC in 1984, noted the tension between 'optimism and faith in the capacity of mankind to progress towards a world without conflicts,' and humanity's 'apparent inability to learn from past experience' and an anxiety 'nurtured by the observation that war is still very much a reality'. In response to questions, Gnaedinger spoke of the challenge to convince the doubting parts of the Muslim world 'that the cross we carry (the Red Cross) is not of the Western world but that it is also rooted in their culture'. He also spoke of the more than 600 prisoners from over 40 countries being held in Cuba at Guantanamo Bay 'outside any legal framework'. 'We insist on these points of principle – this unacceptable state of affairs should end yesterday not tomorrow' he said.

The vote of thanks was given by a field worker for the UN High Commission for Refugees from Ivory Coast. She invited the conference participants and the many day guests to stand for a moment of silence in memory of all the humanitarian workers who have given their lives. It was, she said, a privilege to be able to thank the ICRC Director General for his and his colleagues work. She had worked with ICRC delegates on family reunifications in Rwanda and could testify to the smiles of joy that the Red Cross had been able to put on victims faces when they were able to find trace of their loved ones.

So we've got to the end of the race. Our thanks go to all those who have made this summer possible and to all those who have carried these conferences in their prayers. Several new people were working their way into new jobs; several key people from previous years were not here at all, but I've heard no screams of despair! What we have heard is a powerful cry of need from so many hurting parts of the world. Not a cry of despair, but a cry that cuts through any complacency. The best that we're doing to tackle the world's problems isn't good enough. Perhaps in the past, ignorance was in part an excuse and in part a protection. Now we know so much more about what's going wrong – and what's not going right. And we desperately need the hope that comes from steps of change taken by ordinary people like us, of and their 'initiatives of change'.

Throughout the summer, some of us have been trying to work on the dates and the programme for next summer's conferences – so a draft programme exists and is going the rounds and dates are already fixed. They will be visible on the Caux Web site by the end of August.

Cooler, weary and grateful greetings from Caux, Andrew Stallybrass