

HEALING HISTORY: MEMORY, LEGACY AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Dr Ed Ayers, Honourable Senator Tim Kaine, Honourable Mayor Dwight Jones, Dr Gail Christopher, members of the host committee, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a huge pleasure and honour to bring greetings and best wishes to you all on behalf of Initiatives of Change International. I stand here with a huge sense of anticipation and excitement about the days ahead.

Before arriving in Richmond, I was lucky enough to spend a few days in Washington DC. As I wandered around that magnificent city with all its monuments of history – I was inspired once again by the ideals of equality, dignity, respect and justice on which this country is based. I was also reminded of the huge sacrifices, at home and abroad, that have been made to continue to uphold these ideals. A timely reminder that, at both personal and national level, the ideals we believe in are always accompanied by sacrifice to ensure their continuance and durability.

As the invitation says, despite great strides toward racial healing, the wounds of history and systemic racism and discrimination along ethnic or religious lines continue to hinder efforts to build healthy, inclusive communities in societies around the world.

I think this conference is timely and important for a number of reasons:

1) Anyone surveying the world today is aware of the almost perpetual cycle of historical pain, suffering and oppression. We need an alternative approach that enables painful humiliating historical memories to be heard, injustices to be addressed and dignity to be restored to create harmonious diverse communities. The lessons you have learnt have relevance much wider than your national shores.

2) You are not only dealing with the memory and legacy of history but also exploring the role that economic deprivation, education and health disparities, institution biases play in perpetuating discrimination and inequity. This holistic approach to healing history is important for the changes to enable future equal opportunities - this multi-dimensional approach needs to be stressed.

3) The emphasis on the importance of institutions, as well as individuals in creating collaborative partnerships and networks to find solutions and create effective communities. Ordinary people as well as leaders and politicians are needed. Everyone is both active and important if we want to enshrine equity, dignity for all and meet the basic needs of everyone. None of us are passive observers or spectators in this process.

4) The interdependent world that we now live in means that the same issues are being confronted everywhere. How do we make our diverse communities work so that no one feels marginalized or excluded and everyone has opportunities for meaningful work and a purpose? The similarity of the problems worldwide means that solutions are transferable; and we will hear more about the experiences of other countries as well as lessons they have learnt in the coming days.

For sustainable change to become a reality, institutions need to have at their heart men and women of moral integrity. The “good” in governance is about the value based approach that people of integrity embed in systems and institutions to enable them to meet the deepest needs of all people.

“Initiatives of Change” is a worldwide movement of people of diverse cultures and backgrounds, who are committed to the transformation of society through changes in human motives and behaviour, starting with their own. Each person has something unique to contribute to building a just, peaceful and sustainable world. IofC focuses on the vital link between personal change and global change. Silence is a powerful tool for change. In silence we can access deep wisdom and find inspiration and inner strength to be more effective change-makers. I believe that IofC’s greatest strength is that it generates grassroots initiatives by passionate people who start with themselves, think globally but act locally.

IofC has three focus areas:

- **Trust building:** Peace and social cohesion are achieved by building trust and reconciliation across national, religious, ethnic and cultural divides.
- **Ethical leadership:** good governance at every level is achieved by developing a leadership culture based on moral integrity, compassion and selfless service.
- **Sustainable living:** economic justice and environmental sustainability are enabled by inspiring transformation of motives and behaviours.

Active in over 60 countries, our contribution in these focus areas is through individual and grass roots initiatives, training programmes for young people in many parts of the world including F4F in Eastern Europe; CoP a programme that empowers women to be facilitators of dialogue in their communities and films like the “Imam and the Pastor”. We also arrange dialogues and conferences - in our two main conference centres in Switzerland and India - on themes of trust building, good governance and business integrity. This makes us active participants and keen to partner with other likeminded organisations interested in these themes and finding long term value based solutions to issues of healing memory, social cohesion and equity. I hope that some of you will come and share your much-needed experiences at our conference centres in the future.

Most people would agree that liberty, fraternity, equality, justice and dignity are the fruits of an ideal society. However they don’t just happen in a society. The behaviours, values and practises of all of us make the fruits of democracy a reality for everyone. Do the hundreds of small encounters we have every day make others feel dignity, listened to, valued, included and respected?

I carry a coin in my purse: a 2 pound coin that was produced in 2007 to commemorate the 200 anniversary of the abolition of slavery in the UK, on the edge it says “am I not a man and a brother”. The coin is my constant reminder that but for the grace of God I am capable of acts that can hurt, humiliate, cause pain and belittle people. With God’s grace the daily choices I make can be a constructive contribution to an inclusive truly equitable society by uplifting people and giving them dignity and respect. Our personal behavior may only make a small difference but we have to work at both the personal and institutional levels - as Jean Monet said: “nothing happens without people, nothing lasts without institutions”.

My hope, and expectation, is that this conference will enable all of us to learn how to be more effective in our role as change-makers at personal, institutional and national levels.