

EXTENDED GLOBAL ASSEMBLY 2015-07-18

It is a great pleasure to welcome you, on behalf of the International Council, the Operational team and the preparation team to this Extended Global Assembly in Caux.

It is easy as you look around the room today to see that Initiatives of Change is a worldwide movement of diverse cultures and background. Behind the many faces - those you know and those you don't yet know - are a multiplicity of personal stories, commitment, sacrifice and a real desire to make a difference in society. Each person has their own unique rich and inspiring story.

We also represent a diversity of passions and interests: those with a passion for dialogue and trust building, those interested in ethical leadership development and those interested in economy and business as well as land sustainability. As you will discover in the coming days there are artists, musicians, poets, farmers, writers, lawyers, business men, trainers, academics, community workers, linguists to name but a few.

About 20 years ago three of us went to visit a senior Iranian Ayatollah who lived in the west. Before we met him we had time with his western advisor. As we waited he quizzed us about IofC and we dutifully tried to give him the best of what we thought were relevant IofC stories. The more we progressed the more our stories were rebuffed with cynicism, as he still could not fully understand what we were about. At the end, almost in exasperation, he had to admit that there must be something to IofC as he was "intrigued and interested by whatever had brought together an English Protestant, an Egyptian Muslim and a French Catholic!"

It is perhaps one of the truly remarkable things about this movement that it brings together such a diversity of people who believe in the link between personal change and global change. As we experience the natural irritations and rubs of being together - let us not lose sight of the wonder of this diverse network of friends that we have. Let's acknowledge and celebrate each other's commitment and gifts.

As you all represent this movement in different countries around the world, you are all well aware of the key ingredients of our approach:

- Searching for inner wisdom, "quiet times" for insights and unexpected directions
- Examining our motives and behaviours using absolute standards as a starting point of personal transformation
- Listening to others, honest conversations and an open spirit to build trust within teams and enable partnerships
- Moving into action to address local and global issues.

The key thing about our approach is that we try to turn theory into practice and an idea into a "life lived", an experience that can make a difference. If you read our annual report or the Caux conference reports, venture onto our various websites or the Xchange you will find many inspiring stories of change, impact and hope. We struggle or are hesitant sometimes to express our basic approach - yet paradoxically new generations, are delighted to discover the mystery of quiet times and our approach.

One of the advantages of being together in the coming days is that we will be weaving together a picture of the world needs and how we are responding to those needs locally and regionally within the framework of the three focus areas “**Trust building**”, “**Ethical leadership**” and “**Sustainable living**” to gain understanding of our world wide work.

But we also need to look at our endeavours with more critical mind-set. We need to avoid the trap of overemphasising our successes and not looking more analytically at the factors that hold us back: such as fractured relationships, divisions, lack of transparency, baggage from the past, silo mentality, lack of clear culture of learning and development and sometimes lack of compassion towards each other. As we reflect on what we are doing and should be doing, can we also look at the “finger pointing back at each of us “ to search for new insights that would enable us to be more authentic, fulfil our potential and to work more effectively across internal boundaries and external partnerships?

After reflecting on the network survey in 2014 the International Council identified our own priorities in serving the world work:

- 1) Nurturing the spiritual wellbeing of the movement
- 2) Facilitating networking and capacity-building
- 3) Providing strategic direction and focus.

We feel that these three elements are the building blocks of effective team working nationally and internationally.

When the International Council first envisaged this extended GA – our hope was that this would be a “moment to convene, as a movement, network and organisation to learn from each other, build stronger relationships and partnerships, develop new ideas and take our next step forward together”. We should also emerge with a much clearer picture of our collective work and the relevance of our basic approach to the issues and needs of our time.

As some of you know I am a great fan of Rumi and his poetry. I would like to share a few tips to capture the spirit and practices I hope we can embrace together during these days:

- 1) **SILENCE**: “Move out of the tangle of fear thinking, live in silence”
- 2) **LOOK INSIDE**: “Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it”
- 3) **BE BOLD**: “Do not be satisfied with the stories that come before you. Unfold your own myth”
- 4) **HAVE GRATITUDE**: “Wear gratitude like a cloak and it will feed every corner of your life”.

One of the people who really inspired me when I first met IofC was Kim Beazley, the longest serving member of Parliament in Australia and Minister for Education when I was at school in Canberra. He later described the challenge of having a quiet time and looking at his life with “nothing to prove, nothing to justify and nothing to gain for himself”.

That sentence has stayed with me all my life and is my check-list for my integrity and authenticity. In the last week before I came to Caux, I passed this sentence on to my coach who is supporting me in my deputy medical director role. He emailed me a few days later rather excitedly "I have tried your code of conduct test - it works"! As we embark on these days of reflection, sharing and discernment -individually and collectively - perhaps if we all kept that sentence in our minds we might all be given some fresh insights and breakthroughs as we find the next steps?

As we all have leadership roles, nationally and internationally, we naturally search to have more cohesion, collective focus and impact on pivotal issues of the world. It is right that we should constantly ask ourselves where we should put our limited energies and capacities, what should we be doing and perhaps what should we stop doing. But perhaps the most important question we should be asking ourselves is what am I individually called to do in serving others?

One of Rumi's life changing tips is: **DO WHAT YOU LOVE**: "Let yourself be drawn by the greater pull of that which you truly love". Perhaps the secret to our teamwork, collective impact and synergy is much more simple than we think. If during these days, each of us discovered our own specific calling to "do what we love" – we might be given, without human effort and striving, a collective impact that is greater than the sum of our parts.

Finally, lets enjoy the rare privilege of these face-to-face days together to connect and strengthen our bonds of deep friendships and remain open to unexpected insights individually and collectively.

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