

Centre de Rencontres Internationales

BUREAU: 1, RUE DE VAREMBÉ
CASE POSTALE 3
CH-1211 GENÈVE 20
TÉL. 022 / 733 09 20
FAX: 022 / 733 02 67

pour le Réarmement moral

CAUX

CENTRE DE RENCONTRES
RUE DU PANORAMA
CH-1824 CAUX
TÉL: 021 / 962 91 11
FAX: 021 / 962 93 55

Caux, 21.08.00

Dear friends,

I was woken long before the early call of the alarm clock by one of the most spectacular summer storms, with continuous thunder and lightning, and wind and rain lashing the house. A fitting close to this hectic, intense, rich and wonderful week. With the house at its fullest, and indeed overfull, we've been saved by the weather - we've been able to spill out onto the terrace all through the day, enjoying glorious hot weather at last.

It's my poor, standard excuse, but I've seen and experienced so little of all that was going on. So much was in individual conversations, in the confidentiality of the communities, and in the host of parallel workshops I've been unable to attend. But I'll do my best! You will have some flavour of these days from the deluge of press releases (with this letter, or available on the Caux Web site). Our small press team had the feeling that we were racing to keep up, with another story on the way before the previous was checked and off. We were even driven to hoping for a great, deep meeting - but without any story, please!

The apologies of two Lebanese former militiamen had an electric quality, stunning and deeply moving all those present. A Christian apologising for his superiority, and for the wrong he'd done to the Muslims, a Muslim prompted to apologise in turn for the wrongs he'd done to the Christian community. They reminded us of the famous apology of Irène Laure - and who knows what new life may flow from these courageous steps?

I sat down last night with the Dutch founder of a European centre for conflict prevention, here for the first time. He'd come expecting something of a holiday, while meeting a few interesting people. "It's been far more than I expected," he said, "but no holiday." Very different from most of the conferences he attends, he felt that Caux is a jewel, a place where people go deeper, beyond the intellectual, to a sharing of experience, from the heart, that leaves no-one untouched. "It's fantastic, superb. No-one else has a place like this."

There was a series of three workshops on "Euro-Mediterranean Relationships: Jews, Christians, and Muslims - Healing the past and building the future". Three sub-groups, each headed by a person from each faith, met over three days. Perhaps an important "sound barrier" has been broken. I cannot recall such a time of un-self-conscious sharing and meeting of people of different faiths.

A Politicians' Round Table met for the fourth year running, attended by two former Prime Ministers - from Japan and Papua New Guinea, with discussions on the Korean peninsula after the historic summit meeting between the leaders of North and South, the Balkans, Africa. The pain of countries and continents, and the more personal hurts of individuals have been so very present - yet again and again we've heard that there's some strange magic in knowing that one is not alone in suffering, that others elsewhere go through pain too, in their struggle for a better future. This is, I guess, an important part of the still growing success of these sessions. And the new President of the Swiss Foundation, Cornelio Sommaruga, has been a sensitive host at the heart of it all; suggesting a time of quiet at the start of the PRT's opening dinner, embracing the two Aboriginal women who spoke and presented the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island's flags.

There was the Israeli father, whose son had been kidnapped, and died in a rescue attempt who now works with Palestinians for healing the circle of revenge. "There've been enough tears, enough bloodshed, enough suffering and mourning," he said. One of the catering professionals who came at intervals through the summer to oversee the training of the teams asked after a stirring chance encounter over a meal with a Lebanese and an Israeli woman, "Is it always like this? It's not good for the digestion!" The laying of tables for breakfast went on around a small crowd marking the start of the Jewish Sabbath. "I came with a deep need to be healed, and friends here have taken the time to listen to me," said an Indian woman. "Now I want to listen to others when I get back home, since to listen is to heal."

Another of those taking part was a senior German working at the International Labour Organisation in Geneva. At the end of July he'd been visiting a cousin in the Grand Hotel, and dropped in out of curiosity at Mountain House. On the point of being turned away, he was invited in to a meeting. Back in Geneva he e-mailed his application for the AfR session. He took part in the PRT, and spoke on the need for a more just economic order, quoting Frank Buchman, after reading Theo Spoerri's biography of Buchman, *Dynamic Out Of Silence*, straight through.

There's been a private meeting of some 20 Africans from the conflict-ridden Great Lakes region of conflict, and several have commented on the very high quality of the African representation. "Our lands send us into so many forms of exile," commented one young African, returning to her continent, despite friends back home saying, "You've escaped, stay away." She continued, "Many of us abandon ship, but hope that we can climb back one day as captain. We're not ready to face the rough waters."

Three journalists from Radio France International have been to stay and interview participants. Along with a fourth journalist who came for the inter-faith round table evening, all were absolutely wowed by the place and the people met, as well as producing good interviews that have already reached many more. "Incredible. Why isn't this place better known?" asked one. And we've also had the visit of teams from three Swiss public relations firms from among whom we'll choose one to advise us on how to improve Caux's media and communications outreach.

All through the week, we've also been trying to fit in other, more private, meetings, aimed at shaping the Caux 2001 summer programme. We've made giant strides, and hope to have a draft programme by the end of next month, and the final, printed programme in November in time for the Cartigny planning meeting.

Of course, it's not been all meetings. For the Bachaholics, there was a fine classical piano concert by a young Swiss-Lebanese pianist, Pierre El-Doueihi. David Mills and others provided powerful songs for all the meetings. Joe Carter took a large part of another musical evening with his deep bass voice and his story of the African Americans. The large group from the Caribbean gave a colourful evening of slides, music and colour, but spiced with some fine statements. A final 'cultural evening' saw the hall decorated with the flags of all the peoples present, and a fantastic variety of styles and productions. And there was time for an outing one day, between the end of the morning meeting and supper, with buses going to Geneva (the Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum), to Bern and to Gruyère (to visit a cheese factory).

"Witnessing to hope" was the title of this week. And we've been witnesses to hope here. Now the house is fast emptying, and the change-over to the hotel school starts. We must all depart, and witness to hope where we live.

Weary best wishes from all still here!

Andrew Stallybrass

P.S. There will be a winter - New Year conference in Caux from 26th December 2000 until 2nd January 2001, on the theme "Are You Listening? A family time of relaxation and sharing".