

Official day Caux 2014

Ahlan wa sahlam wa salam Alaikum. Welcome and Peace be upon you.

It is always a great pleasure to also welcome you in Caux today. Caux has been an Initiatives of Change world conference centre for over 70 years. From the start, the “world has walked into the heart” of this place. Here, people from all backgrounds and traditions have come to discover for themselves the connection between personal change and lasting transformation in society. Many have been inspired by what they have found here. They have gone on to make a difference in their own families, communities and the world.

When I first met the ideas of Initiatives of Change I was a teenager. At the time I thought that life in the 21st century was dependent on a robust scientific mind and hard work; that faith was a personal matter and that democracy, good governance, integrity in economy were matters that politicians, governments and business men should deal with.

At the youth camp I was invited to, I was struck by the quality of people I met and the way they combined a wide interest in the world with a deep care for people. They thought of living to change the world but started with small steps in their own lives and communities. I was intrigued and captivated to start this experiment myself.

When I had my first quiet time, I thought I would have dramatic thoughts about the world. Instead I had two simple thoughts: you are jealous of your older fun loving extravert brother and you are dishonest since as you take change from your father’s dressing table without asking for his permission. I apologised to both of them - as it dawned on me that if I wanted to see the world different I had to start with my own personal motives and behaviours first and deal with the integrity gap in my own life.

A few years later when I started work, I discovered that the hospital had overpaid my salary one month. It was tempting to keep the money but I realised that if I wanted an answer to corruption in the Middle East and the wider world I had to be honest in my own life. I sent the money back to the hospital. Little did I realise the chaos that this caused at the other end, as this was something that had not happened before. They did not know what to do with the money or where to put it. Because I had sent back money they went back and checked all my previous month’s salaries and discovered that they owed money to me. A few weeks later I received a cheque from them, which was 100x, the value of the one I had sent them. Honesty does pay!!

Since that initial encounter with Initiatives of Change I have felt lucky to find two calling for my life. One calling is to children and their health and wellbeing as a medical doctor. The second calling was to build bridges of trust and understanding between people of different cultures and backgrounds. It is this second calling to be part of the trust building work of Initiatives of Change that led me on an adventure that culminates in me standing here today.

I still remember my first visit to Caux in 1979. The world was here learning to translate the theory of our ideals into practice as we lived along side each other each day and learnt from each other. It was here that my conviction that ordinary people could do extraordinary things and really make a difference in the world was heightened.

It was this strong conviction about the role of ordinary people that helped me decide to accept to be president. Given my illustrious predecessors, I was reluctant to take this thought seriously. During a quiet reflection, when I was asked to consider it again, I had two clear thoughts. Are you willing to serve despite your limitations and are you willing to step out of your comfort zone because you believe that ordinary people can make a difference in the world? The final answer then was relatively simple.

So whenever I come to Caux at the start of each summer it is usually with a mixture of emotions.

- Gratitude for the sacrifices that were made, especially by the Swiss, and that continue to be made to enable Caux to serve the world.
- Appreciation for the space Caux creates to enable difficult conversations to happen that are the start of understanding, tolerance and transformative actions.
- Excitement, a renewed sense of anticipation, about the new stories and life changing initiatives that will be written for years to come as those who come to Caux this year once again take its inspiration out to the world.

The approach and vision that underpin Caux and the work of Initiatives of Change International are the same. The starting point is a self-reflection at one's own motives and behaviour against the yardstick of absolute standards of honesty, purity, unselfishness and love. We all live in community - so a second step is to listen to others in an open spirit that enables honest conversations to take place through which trust, understanding and tolerance can emerge. Once this understanding has been gained it is possible to engage together and work for solutions in all the areas we are passionate about – whether this is peace building, economy, good governance or sustainability.

During the course of the afternoon you will be able to hear more about the work of Initiatives of Change International but I just wanted to highlight what our key focus areas are.

Initiatives of Change has three key focus areas:

- 1) Trust building and reconciliation across divides to enable peace and social cohesion to be established in our communities. "Creators of Peace" is a programme of IofC that enables and empowers women work as peace builders in their communities that has gone to more than 40 countries including most recently Iraq and Egypt. Another examples is work of the Imam and The pastor from Nigeria who took the courageous step to move from fighting to working together for peace. They had taken their methodology to Kenya and most recently to Chad (you can see a film about this this afternoon).

- 2) Ethical leadership - working to develop a culture of leadership that is based on moral integrity, compassion and selfless service is another strong focus of our international work. In India, at our second international conference centre, there is a long standing training programme Heart of Effective Leadership [which some of the conference participants here for TIGE are able to experience. Foundations for Freedom is a programme in Eastern Europe which was established in 1993 to foster free democratic and just society in that region – there work needed now even more than before. In Africa there is a long standing programme to train the next generation of leaders that will address the needs of that vast continent.
- 3) Sustainable living is the third focus of our work. These programmes and initiatives aim to inspire the needed transformation in motives and behaviours that will enable economic integrity and a sustainable environment for all. As well as the conference series TIGE, there is an initiative called “Land Lives and Peace” which is exploring the link between conflict resolution and land productivity for the future – a work we are engaged in with the collaboration of UN Convention Combat Desertification.

Democracy can't be built without trust. Without ethical people, institutions can't thrive and deliver their roles in underpinning society. All these issues are too important for us to leave for politicians and governments if we want sustainable societies in which everyone has dignity, equality and all their needs met. Ordinary people can do extraordinary things if they live a life of service and integrity. We can all play a part in creating a better world if we start with ourselves. There are still many more pages of stories to be written about the history of peace-building and change making that ripples from this majestic setting of Caux and the International work of Initiatives of Change. While we celebrate the past and create the present, perhaps the best stories of change and impact are yet to come.

Omnia Marzouk
4 July 2014.