

Omnia Marzouk Official day 2013

On behalf of Initiatives of Change International I would also like to welcome you in Caux for the official open day. Whether this is your first visit to Caux or you have been here before you can't help being inspired by the beautiful surroundings we are in and the beautifully restored conference Centre we are in.

After the devastation of World War 2, 90 Swiss families who were inspired by the ideas of Initiatives of Change, gave their possessions and money to buy this then derelict hotel because they had a vision that it was meant to serve the world as a space where people could come to nurture efforts to create lasting peace and prevent future wars. Whenever I come up to Caux at the start of the summer conferences, I always pause with gratitude and thanks for those visionary families, some of the descendants of these pioneers are with us, what a precious gift you have given us and the world

But it is not the view or the beautifully restored building that makes me come back and look forward to the start of each summer.

I first came here as a medical student at the age of 21. At the time there was an important conference going on: attended by over 400 people who were leaders, diplomats, senior people – a lot of important people discussing the issue of dialogue and reconciliation. A lot was going on to keep the conference organizers occupied and busy. I arrived with another student in the evening and after registering it was suggested we go down to supper after our long trip. By the time we arrived the dining room was empty, everyone had gone back to a plenary meeting and a few people were left in the kitchen who produced supper just for the two of us. A continental omlette arrived but the person who served it immediately turned to me and said that I should wait as another omlette was being prepared for me that did not have any ham in it.

I was completely bowled over that in the midst of this conference with so many important people, someone somewhere had taken time to just think that I needed a special meal and had gone to the trouble of organizing for two very unimportant students. It is that combination of big thinking and small actions that are part of what I call the “magical spirit of Caux” that makes me come back.

It is this magical spirit and desire to create a space where people can find their calling and the tools to enhance their effectiveness as change-makers that continues to be at the heart of Caux.

A number of things struck me when I first came to Caux:

1. I caught a real glimpse of diverse people reaching across divides of culture, religion, enmity and barriers of history working together to create a better world – it made me feel it was really possible to take this back down the mountain wherever I was
2. It made me realize that to build a different world where everyone is valued, secure and fulfill their aspirations – you need to think big but also work on small things

3. It brought home to me that to create a better world we needed to work at both grass roots level as well as political level in a creative collaboration to find solutions.
4. It reinforced my belief that ordinary individuals matter and that the way I lived my life with integrity and values was a prerequisite for anything I wanted to do professionally in my community and in the wider world.

It is a privilege and honor to stand here today as President and describe briefly one of the two passions of my life (my other passion is children).

For those of you not familiar with Initiatives of Change, it 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 behavior, starting with their own. Our mission is to inspire, equip and connect like-minded people who wish to address world issues through the same approach.

At the heart of our approach are four elements:

1. taking time to reflect and seek inner wisdom to discover the inner tools that can unlock the creative potential in each person
2. examining our own motives and behavior to develop a culture of moral integrity in our own personal lives
3. reaching out in dialogue to build authentic relationships with others based on trust
4. taking focused action to act to meet local and global needs

IofC International is an association with 34 national and programme members, but it is at work in over 60 countries. Our work is largely at grass roots national level, but we come together internationally on common projects and to support the outreach work of our two international conference centres:- Caux in Switzerland and Asia Plateau in India.

As an international work we feel we have particular expertise to bring to bear on three key focus areas: trust building, ethical leadership and sustainable living.

I would just like to highlight a few examples of how national programmes are combining with the Caux conferences to develop the focus areas of trust building, ethical leadership and sustainable living during this summer of Caux conferences- which is about exploring a people-centered approach to initiatives for human security.

Ethical leadership/Good governance

The national work in India has long been concerned with the question of good governance – they established a “Centre for Governance” and have played a role in the battle against corruption. They have trained thousands of people each year in ethical leadership. In the first conference of the summer on **Just Governance** – they are sharing in one of the learning track “heart of effective leadership”.

Trust building

“Hope in the cities” is a community based programme in the United States of America which has a wide spread programme on educating citizens about the facts of poverty and race. This team is at the heart of the team organizing the second conference of the summer under the title of “healing history-overcoming racism, seeking equity, building community”. This session will bring together examples of Trust building initiatives around the world to share and learn from each other and increase impact.

“Learning to live in a multicultural world” is another conference, which brings together people from different generations and communities who are actively engaged in creating an inclusive multicultural Europe that learns from its own experiences and also experiences from other continents.

During this summer’s conferences, a recently produced documentary “Beyond Forgiveness” which tells a moving story from South Africa will be shown and you will have the chance to see this in the afternoon programme.

Sustainable living

The next two conferences of the summer: “Caux Dialogue on Land and Security” and “Trust and Integrity in the Global Economy” continue to share experiences and build partnerships on the important issues of economic and environmental sustainability for the future.

The French IofC team has long had an interest in peace education for children with an active schools programme in partnership with UNESCO and it is this team that is at the heart of a fifth and new conference theme for Caux: “children as actors for transforming society”. This conference will allow children and adults to explore issues with the full participation of children.

The final conference of the summer “Seeds of Inspiration” is for all those who wish to find the inner resources and refreshment that enables us to continue to be sustained as “change makers” in our various vocations.

I hope this gave you a snap short of the summer conferences and the work of IofC and hope that you will take the opportunity of the different programmes to explore more some of the activities of IofC international and the history of the house. I hope that we will one day be able to welcome you as participants in a summer conference that is of interest to you.