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Dear Friends,

It's the final day of the Caux conferences this summer - I can't write about the weather because it's still dark! I am sitting at a desk with the hum of a fluorescent light and a whirring from some box of technology on the floor with a notice "please do not touch". Sometimes I wear those words on my own heart - I don't want to be touched, or moved or challenged. Yet this house is all about reaching out to each other - sometimes it is a gentle touch of the Spirit, sometimes a shaking of the soul, sometimes a breaking open of the heart and mind. We have seen and felt and heard all of these in the last days.

Along with this letter you will receive a press release which will give you plenty to read, and a flavour of the global significance of some of the contributions we have had from the platform. I will just try to add one or two other insights.

Each day the session "Healing the past, forging the future" started at 9.30am with the "point fixe", explained as being the point on the airport runway at which a pilot carries out his final checks before take-off. For us it meant announcements for the day, followed by a contribution from a person sharing sources of strength found in their own faith tradition. We have been blessed with insights from Buddhist, Christian, Jew, Moslem and Hindu. Certainly a helpful take-off point for the day, which continued with plenary meetings developing dimensions of personal, national and international change.

In the enclosure you will read of the remarkable meeting on "Healing the past between nations". One had the feeling of being present at something historic, with so many speakers being frank about their nation's shortcomings, but with the commitment to work for healing between nations. Also present was the Chinese Ambassador to Geneva who had come especially to meet the Japanese. He asked to speak, and referring to the horrors of the Rape of Nanking by Japanese forces during World War 2, he said "we cannot ignore history; we shouldn't forget, in order not to repeat the mistakes." Then he went on to stress the importance of relations between China and Japan: "When we Chinese look at Sino-Japanese relations we have a very long relationship - more than 2,000 years. For the most part of our history we have enjoyed good relations. Only a small part was tragic."

The problem each afternoon was having to choose which workshop to attend! Those on offer during the week included: Religion in Russia today, Reconciliation in the family, Somalia's Peace Process, Kohanga Reo in New Zealand (about fostering the Maori language), Islam and the West, An Introduction to Meditation, the Kenya Clean Election Campaign and the Jubilee 2000 campaign for debt remission. Each workshop gave a chance to go into depth on its subject, and this whole process put into practice the sub-theme of the week: "Dialogues for justice and reconciliation".

We were treated to a film première one evening with the showing of a new video entitled "Is he my brother?" - the story of Stanley Kinga and Alan Knight of Kenya, two remarkable men who describe their eventful lives, their deep change of attitude to each others' races, and their ongoing commitment to work for a hate-free, fear-free and greed-free Kenya. Two other Kenyans active in this work spoke that evening, Joseph Karanja, a lawyer, and David Waweru, recently an MP. (The video is available next month from MRA Productions in London).

It was not all talk - a beautiful piano recital was given by Silvia Harnisch in the theatre last Sunday. We also enjoyed two colourful cultural evenings, one based on Asia and the Pacific, and another on the whole world! One comment: "The cultural evening gave us a time of enormous fun - real joy together. I learnt that when we are welded into a family such as during that fun and that joy, then we can carry burdens together." And there was some time during the week for quiet reflection on the many impressions and expressions.

The final meeting in the Great Hall on the 20th was organised by younger people in the conference who created a very effective format based on an evening in the Caux Café, with music and dance freezing at certain points to let ten young people from four continents share their hopes and dreams for the future. (Mr Hata was noticed in the front row taking copious notes throughout the morning.) Later the microphone was passed to the audience for their comments on the week. Mrs Sato, a Japanese professional tennis player now active in politics and on her first visit to Caux, said she liked the idea of quiet times in the meetings - "then I can think about what people have said or what I should do. In even only one minute I can think a lot! I will keep doing that." Dr Monica Spooner of Edinburgh told of a friend from Sierra Leone who had had to leave before the meeting: "She looked as if a light had been lit inside her. She had come out of a country in armed conflict, and she says she has experienced renewal. She now knows how and why to apologise to an enemy. She can once again set herself goals, and her list of goals was interspersed with the words 'silence, silence'."

Wednesday, Thursday, Friday: departure days for many, but not the end of the sessions. The Caux Round Table of senior business leaders from Japan, USA and Europe started on Wednesday evening and held meetings through Thursday and Friday. This was their 12th annual meeting in Caux. While not strictly part of the MRA summer conference, the participants attach great value on meeting at Caux because of the spirit in the house. They believe in the importance of principled business leadership, and are looking at ways in which to encourage more business leaders to take responsibility to solve major world problems.

Friday saw the final Caux Lecture of the summer, presented by Professor Vittorio Hösle, philosopher from the University of Essen in Germany. (He had participated in the seminar entitled "Moral Lessons of Soviet History" held at Caux in 1992.) His lecture started off the final weekend session entitled "Morals, Politics and the Citizens". Professor Hösle pointed to the basis of rational egoism which had brought about partial successes in achieving the rule of law and social justice. However justice had not been achieved in what was being bequeathed to future generations.... "the coming generations are absent from the market and from the ballot box." The instruments of democracy and those of the market were ineffective in the use of natural resources and the care of the environment, as well as in international relations.....the question was whether society could muster the moral energy to create the framework necessary for a sustainable development of the world.

Professor Hösle's talk led to an animated panel and audience discussion on Saturday morning and afternoon. The panel comprised a Swiss Federal MP, a member of the Japanese Diet, a Russian Professor of Comparative Religion and a British student. Metaphysics, ideology, corruption, holiness, morals, sin, service: these were some of the words and concepts discussed and analysed, with intellectual rigour, but also with humanity and the acceptance that one's personal moral behaviour is paramount if we want to find the best way forward for society. We certainly felt part of a "dynamic, learning community", the overall theme of this year's summer in Caux.

I started writing this in darkness and now the sun is gently moving westwards. Today has been a day of thanksgiving in the churches here, in our hearts and in the Great Hall. Now life moves on and out into the world. Please spare a thought and prayer for those who are working hard in the next days to hand over the house to the Hotel School, who start their new teaching year with over 250 students, up from 200 last year.

Best greetings for the remainder of 1997!

Geoffrey Craig.