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pour le Réarmement moral

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Caux, 20.08.01

Dear friends,

The sky is dark and overcast, charged still with the clouds that raced in last night, pushed by a near-gale wind that shook the house and whistled into my room. The storm lights were flashing all round the lake, before they were hidden from our sight. Already yesterday, after our final meeting in the morning, the house was rapidly emptying, and I'm one of the many more who will be leaving today. Part of yesterday's meeting was a look back over the six conferences of the summer. What a rich season it has been, so many people and places that have touched our hearts, vignettes that scratch at our memories. Caux is no ivory tower, cut off from 'the real world', but alongside all the 'reality' that we get on our TV screens at home, here we get a sense of the many people, ordinary, and not so ordinary, who are working for 'initiatives of change'.

The growth of the Agenda for Reconciliation into a first conference on 'peace-building initiatives' and a second on 'good governance' seems to have worked. The numbers have been less than 500 so the house has been without the added stress that seems to strike when we hit that figure. And the rich variety of people and groups has hardly changed at all. We were welcomed in 34 languages at the opening meeting, and 64 countries were named. A friend rang to announce his arrival for a confidential private meeting of people from one of the world's crisis regions – but the switchboard operator had no idea what he was talking about, and had the greatest difficulty in finding anyone in the house who knew anything about it. He was impressed with our security!

The accompanying press release will give you something of the Politicians Round Table, and their concluding declaration on 'Good Governance and the Global Village'. Among the signatories were members of parliament from Japan and Korea, the Emir of Kano and political advisors from Ukraine and Cameroon. Algerian Mohammed Sahnoun, now a Deputy Secretary General of the United Nations, and our Caux Lecturer, was another of those taking part, along with Swiss parliamentarian Simonetta Sommaruga.

In the middle of the week, we held our press conference to announce the new name. The following morning, the 7am main French-language Swiss radio carried a superb short item just before the main news, and the largest circulation paper in French-speaking Switzerland, *24-Heures*, carried a two-thirds of a page article. The regional paper in Montreux had a front-page colour photo of Cornelio Sommaruga and Rajmohan Gandhi, who announced the name-change together, along with a large article inside on page three. A sober short item reported the name-change in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, Switzerland's paper of reference, and yesterday's prestigious *Le Monde* from Paris had a front-page story. All of the media so far have faithfully reported that our work is changing its name but not aims or convictions. The *Le Monde* article concludes, 'A fine crowd of people for a bringing up-to-date – now we await the results.' A healthy challenge to us all!

You will see some of the further remarks from our two spokespeople in the press release which also covers the Caux Lecture. At the end of the press conference, Cornelio Sommaruga invited the journalists to enjoy the biscuits and cakes, 'all made by volunteers', and launched into a brief explanation of the way that the house works.

But let's come back to this last week, and try to capture for you some of its magic, as we raced into the last straight of this summer. The opening meeting – and the meetings all through the week – gave us challenging food for the head and for the heart. Rajmohan challenged the 'politically correct' form of racism that holds that 'politicians are a race born in evil and grown in evil', while a fiery young Kenyan denounced Africa's 'functional monarchies with ceremonial democracies'. A former Prime Minister from Japan is accosted in the corridor by a young Japanese-speaking Ukrainian who wants to become a diplomat – a little vignette of the presence of our Eastern neighbours all through the summer, carrying Caux in a very important way. Two of the main speakers for the meeting on 'Good governance and the State' aren't able to come. One, a deputy cabinet Minister in Belgrade, Serbia, is in the thick of a government crisis; the other, a senior United Nations man, is trying to defuse the crisis in Macedonia. Caux is attracting people like this.

Hata, the former Prime Minister from Japan deplores the current PMs visit to a nationalist shrine, and talks of the ethical issues in our nations' pasts. 'Good governance of the past is important for a good governance of the future,' he says, reminding us of his apology last year to Korea. I am touched to hear a Korean MP turning to the great British anti-slavery campaigner as an example for the work that they need to do in East Asia to bring about reconciliation between neighbours. They will need the same persistence over years, and through all setbacks.

We've received visits from Philippe Mottu (and his brother Daniel) and another of the founders, Erich Peyer, along with George Voderstuhl from the US. I'm moved to hear another of that generation say in the final meeting how much the spirit of the young East Europeans had made her think of them starting Caux after the war. A spokesperson from the Kosovo Reconciliation Council talks of the four standards as pillars for his country's development. 'We need justice and law,' he says, 'and we need your experience as warriors for reconciliation.'

The Middle East's sufferings have never been far from our minds. The Egyptian chairperson tells us how she has learnt over the years to meet the other as a human being. 'I couldn't feel the same grudge, the same hatred,' she says, and this has brought her some problems in her own environment. We listen to the pain of a Palestinian Christian, carrying an Israeli passport. He was born ten years before the state. Then a Jew, in also in pain, gently says that there are more sides to the truth, and the dialogue goes on. 'I've seen that the word "humanity" can be a reality,' says an African. A baby cheerfully gurgles on his father's knee at the back of the meeting. 'How do we become global citizens?' asks a retired British MP, who gives us his answer, in steering us toward the Web site of the NGO that he's created (www.globaleye.com), and the chair hails the miracle of a politician who sticks to his allotted time. We come towards the end with a final variety evening, a patchwork of music and magic, of dance and sketch that leads us into a quiet time of prayer from different faiths to express our gratitude for all that has been given in this week and through this summer.

We steal some time to look ahead, to plans for next summer in Caux – the programme will be ready by November, and this means going to press at the end of this month. We also look ahead to the 'Hoho' in Panchgani. 70 are definitely signed on and another 80 have expressed their intent. So this exciting adventure for the future of *Initiatives of Change* needs our prayerful support, and many miracles of funding, between now and the end of the year. Flights are already very heavily booked.

Gratitude is a dangerous exercise – there's always the peril that someone else feels unrecognised, un-thanked. But I can't help saying a special word of appreciation for the antipodeans' support for Caux. We counted 11 New Zealanders the other day, and there's been a small army of Australians all through the summer. If there was a Caux support index, taking into account population and miles or kilometres covered, I've little doubt who'd come out tops!

Grateful greetings from Caux, Andrew Stallybrass