

TOOLS FOR CHANGE

a project of Initiatives of Change

Essential skills and inner resources for peacebuilders and change makers



“An excellent balance of intellectual stimulation, heart stirring and creativity”
Tools for Change 2006 Participant

Conference Report 2006

The first annual Tools for Change conference, a project of the global peacebuilding, leadership and community-building organization Initiatives of Change, took place in Caux, Switzerland from July 14-21, 2006. **The conference aimed to gather both the accumulated wisdom and expertise of the 60+ year history of Initiatives of Change and the cutting edge of training in the fields of conflict transformation and leadership development, and present it to ordinary people in order to strengthen their abilities to make change—in the world, in their relationships, and in themselves.**

THE PROJECT

Initiatives of Change (IofC) is a **global network of local groups that believe that lasting social change must involve change at every level: political, social, and personal.** IofC workers and volunteers have been involved in projects as diverse as reconciliation between France and Germany just after World War II, the peaceful decolonization of Morocco, Tunisia and Zimbabwe, reconciliation between white Americans and African-Americans in the United States, clean election campaigns in Kenya and the Solomon Islands, and programs to develop young leaders in civil society in Eastern Europe. No matter what the project, IofC workers aim to cause individuals to reflect on their values and build trust and reconciliation between groups in order to bring about change.

Tools for Change aims to collect and amplify the strengths of this formidable array of IofC projects. Every summer, IofC's conference center in Caux, Switzerland provides a space for conferences, intercultural dialogue, and personal and spiritual reflection: starting in 2006 and continuing for at least two more years, one week of this summer is dedicated to the Tools for Change conference. In 2006, the conference saw **more than 200 participants from all over the world and all sectors of society, from both inside and outside the IofC network.** Participants spoke English, French, German, Spanish, Russian and Arabic, with sizable groups from countries as diverse as France, Ukraine, Uruguay, Lebanon, and Tunisia. **Everyone, from college students to diplomats, participated in plenary presentations, community reflection sessions, and an intensive week-long elective course devoted to the skills of being an agent for change.**

PROGRAM STRUCTURE

The conference presented participants with two sets of concepts: the **core themes** of the work of Initiatives of Change and the **key skills** needed to be an agent of change. One IofC core theme was highlighted every day in the plenary presentations through a mixture of personal stories and thought-provoking reflections on the themes.

Themes

The IofC core themes highlighted included:

- The role of **hospitality** in building peace
- **Moral standards and values** as foundations of relationships of trust
- **Inner listening** to intuition or spiritual/religious wisdom
- Facilitating **honest conversations** about history
- Creating spaces for **forgiveness**, apology and healing
- Telling **personal stories** to help bring others on a journey of change

Every participant belonged to a "community group" of 20-25 people: these groups met daily, as a whole and in smaller breakout groups, to discuss the theme and share their own experiences. In a distinctive feature of the Caux conference experience, **these community groups also acted as "service teams" that played an integral role in the working of the center** through the preparation of food in the kitchen, the serving of tea and coffee at meals, and housekeeping: an experience that does as much for team-building and cross-cultural communication as many formally structured group activities.

Plenary Sessions

The conference themes were addressed in depth by lectures, reflections, personal stories and sketches. Speakers included Mari Fitzduff, Professor of Coexistence and Director of the Master's Program in Intercommunal Coexistence at Brandeis University, who drew on her experience in Northern Ireland to discuss the personal and professional challenges of international peacebuilding. Conference texts are posted on the website: <http://toolsforchange.iofc.org>.

Learning Tracks

Participants developed key skills of being a peacebuilder or agent for change by selecting a Learning Track course to attend throughout the week. **The Learning Tracks, taught by academics and committed workers in the fields of conflict transformation, dialogue, and leadership development, met for three hours each day to give participants in-depth exposure to a set of skills.** In 2006 the learning track themes were:

Communication and Presentation:

Participants worked to improve the quality and potential impact of spoken presentations. They discussed presentation styles, communication strategies, and delivery options, and gave each participant the opportunity to make a short structured presentation.

Krish Raval, Chief Executive, Learn to Lead leadership training program and Senior Fellow, James MacGregor Burns Academy of Leadership, University of Maryland; David Curtis, organizational consultant, Allium Consulting Ltd

Team Building:

The course explored the nature of teams, and offered ways to measure and analyze team relationships in order to steer team development in a positive direction.

Krish Raval, David Curtis

Honest Conversations:

Participants learned about the obstacles to honest conversation that lie within us and within others, and worked on overcoming those obstacles. The course aimed to give participants clarity about what keeps people from honest conversation, an increased ability to use personal stories to invite others into honest conversation, and a practical tool that can be helpful in creating conversations in conflict situations.

Dr. David Camp, organizational and diversity consultant; Cricket White, National Director of Training, IofC USA

Facilitation:

Participants developed specific facilitation techniques for generating greater honesty in communication among groups of people, allowing them to assist groups as either the designated facilitator or a committed participant. Techniques included: how to use a sequence of questions to help a group representing different communities to build greater trust, how to use a structured process to help a group better understand its internal conflicts, and key tips on group facilitation in general.

Dr. David Camp, Cricket White

Conflict Transformation and Healing History:

Participants discovered the interplay between history and current conflicts and learned how to assess the need for reconciliation. Tools for creating an environment for forgiveness and atonement were discussed and practiced, and the relationship between reconciliation, justice and healing was explored.

Dr. Barry Hart, Professor of Conflict and Trauma Studies, Eastern Mennonite University; Michelle LeBaron, Director of Program on Dispute Resolution and Professor of Law, University of British Columbia; Dr. Margaret Smith, Professor, School of International Service, American University

Effective Organizational Analysis and Planning:

Participants learned how to become agents of change in their own organizations, through techniques of organizational analysis and an understanding of organizational change. Tools included investigating organizational structures, gaining comfort at “rocking the boat” one’s own organization, and negotiating with others as part of a strategy for change.

Dr. Michael Prior, organizational development and strategic planning consultant; Susan Ellis, organizational and personal development consultant

Inner Resources for Change:

Effective peacebuilders need strategies for creating and nurturing their own inner resources, and this track exposed participants to different approaches to creating personal interior stability in a chaotic setting. Components included: inward listening to intuition, conscience, and spiritual or religious guidance; assessing and articulating one’s own personal values and visions; connecting personally to topics of reconciliation and forgiveness; and developing skills of servant leadership based on inner values and strength.

Jean Brown, grassroots peacebuilder, Initiatives of Change; Dr. Omnia Marzouk, physician and grassroots peacebuilder, Initiatives of Change; Michael LaBrosse, consultant and leadership coach; Ismar Villavicencio, Director, Gente que Avanza youth leadership program; Alex Ramirez and Monica Lopez, coaches, Compass personal development program

PARTICIPANT STATEMENTS/EVALUATION RESULTS

Participants completed post-conference evaluation forms designed by Dr. Bonnie Dowdy of Hope in the Cities. Key findings include:

- ◆65% of respondents said that the learning tracks presented "important new learning."
- ◆Of previous participants in community groups at Caux, 70% said that the Tools for Change structure of communities made the experience more meaningful.
- ◆ Most participants (65%) said that leadership by community facilitators was "excellent" and 59% reported "new learning" and 38% "important new learning."
- ◆ Areas cited for improvement included a) the need for more presentations and courses in languages other than English (the conference was extremely multilingual, with only 47% of respondents choosing to fill out the evaluation form in English.) and b) the need to give participants more time to reflect and relate to each other in the middle of a busy schedule.

Feedback from participants:

"I learned the vital importance of relationship-building through listening skills."

"I learned that anyone can be involved in reconciliation, starting on their own doorstep."

"I will use all the exercises with my team and share with other NGOs."

The two participants from Ethiopia on returning home gave workshops to their team about what they had learnt in the learning tracks.

FUTURE PLANS

Tools for Change began with a three-year vision that featured three annual conferences at the lofC conference center in Caux, Switzerland. **The 2007 conference will be held from August 4-11, 2007.** Based on the success of the 2006 conference, three long-term goals have been identified:

- To continue strengthening the capacity of lofC's global network by training individuals and teams to be able to do sustained work on critical issues
- To train trainers of lofC and other NGO's and international institutions like the United Nations
- To provide a space for leading practitioners and thought leaders to come together for mutual support and new perspectives

Conference Director: Rob Corcoran, *National Director, Initiatives of Change, USA*

Organizing committee: Fiona Leggat, Cricket White, Susan Corcoran, Howard Grace, Claire Leggat, Laurence Le Moing, Krish Raval, Michael Prior

Please visit <http://toolsforchange.iofc.org> for additional conference and registration information.

Zeke Reich
March 2007