Delegates from Canada’s ‘four solitudes’, Aboriginal, Francophone, Anglophone, and more recent immigrants came together to explore how acknowledgement of the past - with its achievements and its wounds - can strengthen our hearts and our spirits for future generations.
Towards 2008 and beyond

As Canada has become increasingly multi-cultural with ever expanding waves of immigration, the imperative to build a community of communities and to help all Canadians - original peoples, long-term settlers and those more newly arrived - to break out of their solitudes and build trust with ‘the other’, has been a continuing objective of Initiatives of Change. Two years ago, inspired by the approaching 400th anniversary of the first European settlement in what is now Quebec City, a group of Canadians from East and West embarked on a process of honest dialogue and healing of past hurts, as a necessary prelude to a deeper trust-building and breaking down of the solitudes.

In partnership with groups such as Global Indigenous Dialogue (GID) and National Day of Healing and Reconciliation (NDHR), IofC planned a weekend where those engaged on this journey could meet together, with others, revisit the relationship between Canada’s peoples and carry forward the process already begun.

The Imam and the Pastor

Since the launch of the process in 2006, teams in different parts of the country have been engaging in dialogue and bridge building within and between communities. A common thread has been the use of the film The Imam & the Pastor as an effective dialogue tool, enhanced in some cases by the presence of Pastor Wuye and Imam Ashafa themselves. In April 2008 the film was shown for the first time in its French language version in Montreal and Quebec City.

Across the land

Delegates from different regions reported on other initiatives in which they have been engaged: in Vancouver, facilitating dialogue among Muslim youth and countering racism towards Chinese Canadians; in Calgary, strengthening relations between local First Nations and city residents, students learning, through the activities of the IofC Club at the University of Calgary, how to be effective agents of change; in Regina, building bridges of understanding with the French language community of Saskatchewan; in Hamilton, addressing issues of discrimination based on race and religion through the Hope in the Cities programme; in Quebec City, addressing the challenges of building an effective team, through Groupe Changer, and working with Heritage and Sharing in preparing this very fruitful Canadian gathering!
A special invitation went to countries which played a major role in the history of Quebec City, viz. France, the United Kingdom and the United States. Rather than examine the good and bad of these historical relationships, delegates were asked to share what is being done today through Initiatives of Change in each country towards building a community of communities.

United Kingdom

A message from Britain began, “In the UK, we face the challenges of how to create cohesion, trust and respect for all the people of the world who gather here. We want to acknowledge the wrongs and the pain caused by some of our nation’s legislative and cultural behaviour. It has created division both at home and in many parts of the world. We now need to move forward in the knowledge of our past, to create the new partnerships of the future.” The message went on to describe actions using “dialogue and the training of facilitators as tools for transformation”, bringing together employers and marginalized communities who are discriminated against in their search for work and breaking through British reticence to engage with ‘the stranger’.

France

Jean Fayet, President of Initiatives et Changement France, attending the conference with his wife, congratulated his hosts on the choice of theme, “which truly reflects what the world needs most.” He gave a presentation about the Initiative Dialogue project in France, which aims to bring down the walls of misunderstanding, prejudice and fear, which exist at the heart of French society, particularly between Muslims (who number 6 million) and non-Muslims. It demonstrates that a dialogue characterized by frankness and respect, in which one learns to question one’s own behaviour and motivation, can create relationships of trust essential to the building of a more just and humane society. He quoted a Muslim woman who found that the sincere friendships built through Initiative Dialogue formed the basis of solid mutual support at times of difficulty, such as ‘9/11’.

United States

Representing the US were: Matthew Freeman, who is working part time with Hope in the Cities; Jeanné Isler, a post graduate student in conflict resolution and comparative religion; and Zeke Reich, studying conflict resolution and multiculturalism. Both Jeanné and Zeke are graduates of the Caux Scholars Program. They told about Hope in the Cities, bringing communities together to address issues of racial healing. They followed this with a presentation on the Connecting Communities Fellowship Program, whose goal is to increase the capacity of communities to overcome divisions through the training of skilled facilitators and communicators, capable team builders, informed advocates and credible role models.

From Quebec to Africa

Mme Assana Sangaré, member of the Côte d’Ivoire Parliament since 1975 and formerly Minister responsible for the fight against AIDS, recalled how she came in touch with Initiatives of Change and how it helped her find new hope for her country despite the conflict that had cost the lives of many, including that of her husband. Since 2003 she has initiated action for dialogue and reconciliation in Côte d’Ivoire, assisted by Laurent Gagnon and IofC personnel from other countries, using IofC films, such as For the Love of Tomorrow. In order to work more effectively, Mme Sangaré has set up an Initiatives of Change association – ICCI – in her country. She was attending the conference with her son and daughter, who live in Quebec City.

I to r: Imelda Walker, Toronto; Gwen McLean, Regina ;and Keith Newman, Calgary, listening in to the simultaneous translation provided for the equal numbers of English speaking and French speaking delegates.
400 years after the arrival of European settlers and a few hundred metres from the site where French and English fought for control of the northern part of the continent in 1759, Grand Chief Max Gros-Louis and other leaders of the Wendat Huron Nation greeted Canadians and visitors from other countries, on their traditional territory.

The four hour public event, in partnership with the Quebec Heritage and Sharing committee, took place under a large marquee on the historic Plains of Abraham. Representatives from Canada’s “four solitudes”, Aboriginal, Francophone, Anglophone, and more recent immigrants came together to “explore how acknowledgement of the past - with its achievements and its wounds - can strengthen our hearts and our spirits for future generations.”

**Symbolic Act**

Two peace bowls, one ceramic and one glass, had been crafted and brought to the gathering by Banff sculptor Bev Simms for use in a special symbolic ceremony. Delegates in turn filed by the first bowl, pouring into it water they had brought with them from a lake, river or other source of significance to them, naming it as they did so. Wendat Huron Elder Rolland Sioui then blessed the mingled waters and the Grand Chief took the bowl around the large circle of participants, who each touched the water in a symbolic cleansing of the past. The second bowl, containing stones, sand and a carved stone cup with a flame, was taken around the circle by Luc Lainé, also of the Wendat Huron Nation and Federal Aboriginal Commissioner for the 400th commemoration. Each person took a small stone from the bowl, either to keep or give to someone else, possibly in an act of reconciliation.

Members of *Espace Art Nature*, a group from Neuville, Quebec, skilled in theatre production, were joined by
several others, including a Montagnais family, in a superbly presented and deeply moving depiction of Canadian historical experiences, through song, movement and the spoken word.

**Heritage and Sharing**

Patrice Brodeur, (right) Canada Research Chair on Islam, Pluralism and Globalization, University of Montreal and MC for the event, explained that the Heritage and Sharing committee wanted to bring deeper meaning to “The Encounter”, the theme of the 400th anniversary. The convergence on the Plains of Abraham was “a coming together, recognizing the different and sometimes complex heritage of each one, with the purpose of developing a common future that will be less exclusive than the one in which we have grown up.”

To illustrate this, four people from Quebec City took the stage, each representing one of the four solitudes: Luc Lainé, the First Nations; Jacques Lacoursière, the Francophones; James Thwaites, the Anglophones and Laura Ispas, more recent immigrants. In turn, they shared the experience of their particular heritage within the wider community.

**Learning from history**

Historian and Heritage and Sharing Coordinator Jacques Lacoursière told of an earlier ‘encounter’ that took place in Montreal in 1701, when around forty Indian nations gathered to negotiate a lasting peace. One chief referred to the tree of peace in whose shade “good business” could be conducted and the Governor of New France spoke of the instruments of war from all sides that would be buried. Referring to the ceremony that had just taken place with the water and the stones, Lacoursière said, “May this water nourish the tree of peace, so that it continues to grow and we may once more meet in its shade. May we bury these stones, so that nothing returns to disturb the peace - a peace that respects differences and which is fed by the riches that everyone brings.”

"I felt I was baptised as a Canadian when we shared the water.”
Iman Al Ghafary, Toronto

“Indigenous culture can provide a means to communicate in a healing environment”
Lorne Braun, Vancouver

“I came out of the tent with the challenge of how to relay this message of hope to my native continent of Africa.”
Fessaha Fre Weri, Ottawa

**‘Peace Bowls’**

Banff, Alberta sculptor Bev Simms is seen here with one of the two bowls she made for the ceremony on the Plains. With her is Arthur Weeks, who carved the stone cup that holds the flame in the centre.
What distinguished this weekend from IoC conferences in recent years was the significantly larger number of younger people, and their intention to step out and assume responsibility for the leadership of IoC Canada into the future. The presentations, by several people under the age of 40, were ample evidence that this transition is already taking place. Through a series of exercises (including one which had all delegates standing in straight lines on the conference floor, responding to 27 different requests to “step forward if”; you have a Facebook account; you have faced discrimination; and so on), facilitators Sonja Bergen and Alex Ramirez helped participants discover what will be needed in order to build better links between the generations. By recognizing the strengths and weaknesses of our own and the other generation, we can move towards greater understanding and each will emerge a winner.

Finding Home

Jessie Sutherland (below) from Vancouver, who founded and directs *Worldview Strategies*, conducted a brief reflection on the theme of one of her workshops, “Finding Home”. She used the exercise to explore what the different generations required in order to find a sense of belonging within the IoC network.

While many points were common to all generations, those in their sixties and older saw their contribution including such elements as: mentoring, sharing of values, being custodians of history and heritage. Those forty and younger stressed the importance of: being respected for their ideas and values, having their qualities and abilities recognized, being trusted on financial matters, being given space, being listened to and welcomed.

Among qualities that younger people brought to IoC, in the opinion of the older generation, were: a fresh approach, creativity and a high level of competence. Qualities and approaches that younger people brought, in their own opinion, included: overcoming fear of ‘the other’ and living well in cultural diversity.

Communities praying together

A hundred delegates gathered on Sunday morning, in a semi-circle, in the beautiful meeting hall, as Paule Charbonneau presided over an inter-religious celebration which she and Nathalie Roberge had planned. It began with a recording of “Ce pays” (This Land), a song of haunting beauty by the *Famille Myriam* Community. A single stroke of a small gong preceded each new prayer or reflection by representatives of the different faith groups. The presence of God the Creator, and the prayers being offered up, seemed as tangible as the smoke which rose gently and silently from the incense created specially for the occasion.
Truth and Reconciliation...

Bob Watts (left), Interim Executive Director of the recently created Truth and Reconciliation Commission, told the gathering how important it was for Canadians to hear the voices of the survivors of residential schools. His remarks assume added significance in the light of the historic apology made to the survivors by the Prime Minister in the Canadian Parliament on June 11, 2008. “To hear these stories will create a different understanding between aboriginal and non-aboriginal people in this country. And that different understanding will lead to a different relationship between our peoples.” He said there was great hope among residential school survivors that hearing these stories would change the hearts of the average Canadian. “That was amazing to hear from people who had been so hurt and abused by our Canadian institutions”, he went on, “to have such faith in their fellow citizens.”

...for all Canadians

Watts, who is from the Mohawk and Ojibway Nations, said it was important to engage all Canadians in what is “not just an aboriginal process, but part of the history of Canada. I invite all of you to find ways that you can work with us and participate and find ways of looking at reconciliation in your own life. Reconciliation isn’t just about residential schools. It’s about how we treat each other as family members, as neighbours and as communities. That’s part of the journey we are all on.”

Global Indigenous Dialogue

Alvin Manitopyes, of the Plains Cree and member of the Council of Management of the IofC Association (Canada), spoke on behalf of GID, which brings together indigenous people from all over the world at the IofC conference centre in Caux, Switzerland each year. “There we do our sharing and understand that we have a common history, a common struggle, but also a common vision we need to look at - how we can fulfill our role as caretakers of Mother Earth. At a time when natural disasters are occurring and there is an imbalance in the natural world, we have to look at restoring balance. Through GID we are able to share and give strength to one another and carry forth that message, not only to other nations of people, but also amongst the younger generation in our communities.”

National Day of Healing and Reconciliation

Maggie Hodgson (right), of the Nadleh Whuten Carrier First Nation in BC, founder of NDHR, introduced herself as a partner to IofC. “I live, I work your values and wherever I go I tell what work you do and that you do it holding our hands as Aboriginal people.” NDHR was not only for aboriginal people, she said, but for all who had suffered as a result of past injustice. She addressed herself to a Catholic sister Claudette Dumont (right), who “has walked with our people in Northern Alberta and has listened to my people’s anger and their pain.” Presenting her with a shawl, she continued, “I would like to hold my hands up to you for loving my people and learning their language and respecting us.” She also gave a book to Iman Al Ghafary, from Toronto, telling her, “We have a whole lot of work to do around the Muslim community. In Canada it will happen to us as aboriginal people if we allow it to happen to one other community.”
Towards a Community of Communities: from Solitudes to Partnership - Quebec City, May 23-25, 2008

Moving forward together

“I don’t just see a room full of people; I see ideas that give hope for the future.”

“Going physically, socially, economically interdependent. Now we are morally interdependent.”

“What assumptions must I let go of in order to engage wholeheartedly across differences?”

“Alessandro Anifowose

Genevieve LeBaron

Building trust across the world’s divides

Initiatives of Change (IoC) is a global network open to people of all cultures, nationalities, beliefs and backgrounds, who work towards change, locally and globally, starting with change in their own lives.

Its programmes and activities, such as those described in this report, draw on universal moral and spiritual values and encourage a greater sense of personal and social responsibility.

In Canada, IoC is a registered charitable organization, incorporated since 1944. Contributions are tax-deductible and can be made online or mailed to the address at the bottom of the page.

Charitable Registration/Business No. 11904 5912 RR0001

Initiatives of Change International has special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.

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Books [available from Calgary] mrabooks@ca.iofc.org

• Beyond Borders: IoC in Quebec from 1933 to 2005

• The Worldwide Legacy of Frank Buchman compiled by Archie Mackenzie and David Young, published June, 2008.

DVDs [available from Vancouver] mraproductions@ca.iofc.org

• The Imam & the Pastor: An amazing story of reconciliation in Northern Nigeria

• Highlights of the Canadian gathering in Quebec City, May, 2008, filmed by Drew Webster (right.)

Event Sponsors

We wish to express sincere gratitude to all those, individuals and associations, whose generous contributions have made this event possible.

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