

**Learning to live in a multicultural world: Diaspora and peacemaking in Europe**  
**26 – 31 July 2011, Caux, Switzerland**

### **Introduction**

The concept of multiculturalism is widely seen as doomed to fail by many politicians and experts in Europe. We do not share this opinion: there is no alternative to multicultural coexistence but we have to review some current approaches. We must agree on common rules and values for living together in our pluralistic and multicultural societies. These are global processes, and diaspora communities have become crucial stakeholders at local, national and international levels. They have an important role to play in the development of their host countries and communities, as well as their homelands. In any of these domains, diasporas can either sharpen or cause conflicts, or they can contribute to social stability by acting as peacemakers.

### **Content**

The 2011 conference is a sequel to the 2009 and 2010 conferences on the theme ‘Learning to live in a multicultural world’. The conference will build on the rich experience of Initiatives of Change (IofC) in the fields of relationship transformation and trust-building, with particular emphasis on diaspora communities’ contribution to peacemaking. Additionally, the programme is inspired by the efforts of many diaspora communities to become active citizens of their host countries and to act as peacemakers within their own community.

Such initiatives not only have an important impact on the participation of diaspora members in the host society, but also on reconciliation processes within their communities. In some cases, they have provided individuals or communities with ways and means to overcoming their feelings of revenge towards their former enemies. At the same time, the conference will explore the role and the responsibility of host societies in welcoming newcomers and supporting such processes.

The conference will provide a platform for discussion of expectations, fears, needs and hopes. Instead of confirming the perception that the growing cultural diversity in Europe is a threat to social stability and cohesion, the conference seeks to create a common vision of an inclusive cultural environment and explore ways of realizing it.

### **Aim**

Pursuing the goal of building bridges – within diaspora communities, between diaspora communities all over Europe, and between them and the host societies – the conference will focus on exchanges of best-practice, and connect present and future leaders of diaspora communities and the host societies. It will provide opportunities for reflection on the individual’s contribution to peacemaking in their own personal, professional and communal environments, and provide space for exchanges of ideas and experiences. Through training modules on Facilitation, Peace

Education, Intercultural Mediation, Conflict Transformation, Religious Diversity and Anti-Discrimination, Ethical Leadership, Intergenerational Dialogue, and Media Practices, participants will have the opportunity to acquire practical tools and valuable skills. The conference wants to encourage participants to become changemakers in their own communities as well as in the bigger society.

#### **Programme overview**

##### **26 July 2011: Opening and introduction**

The opening plenary will set the scene for the following days. The terms ‘diaspora’, ‘multicultural society’ and ‘peacemaking’ will be clarified while outlining the need for a common vision. The conference theme will be introduced in the Swiss context to make the link with the conference venue. Taking the current situation in Switzerland, which is characterized by a growing mistrust between diaspora/immigrant communities and the host community, while also acknowledging its long tradition of peace despite cultural, linguistic and religious differences, will provide a fertile ground for further discussions.

##### **27<sup>th</sup> July 2011: Identity**

Identity is a crucial issue when cultural diversity becomes a reality. This is not only true for diasporas, but also – and no less importantly – for the host society. Current debates about religious/cultural symbols, integration or assimilation, about radicalized second- and third-generation immigrants, and the fear of loss of ‘European’ values, are revealing the growing importance of identity. Taking the concept of ‘multiple identities’ as a starting point, the following questions will be addressed: How is the issue of identity related to the growing cultural diversity in Europe? What is the reason for and role of identity politics? What benefits – if any – could the notion of ‘multiple identities’ provide?

##### **28<sup>th</sup> July 2011: Participation and power relations**

This theme will explore the mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion. The plenary will focus on the issues of power and power relations, and relate them to the question of social, economic and political participation of diaspora members. What are the power relations currently in place – within diaspora communities, and between them and host communities? What are the forces for social, political and economical exclusion of diaspora communities? How can diaspora communities influence power relations? Case studies will provide practical examples of how existing power structures can be influenced, and political, economic and social participation increased.

##### **29<sup>th</sup> July 2011: Stakeholders**

We will identify relevant stakeholders and their specific needs, challenges and contribution to peacemaking. Such stakeholders are children and youth, women, men, children and grandchildren of immigrants, but also the host society members, NGOs and policy-makers. Each of them has an important contribution to make and an equal right to be heard.

A round-table will bring together different stakeholders to discuss these issues. The main goal is to raise the awareness of each group's views, concerns and needs, and how every stakeholder can work together for a more just and inclusive Europe.

### **30<sup>th</sup> July 2011: The new 'we'**

The term 'the new "we"', coined by Tariq Ramadan in 2006, implies that new ways of thinking and imagining a multicultural society are needed if it is to be inclusive. Meanwhile, the current political debates are stuck with the traditional either/or choices – integration or assimilation, multiculturalism or communitarianism – none of them having proven to be an adequate response to today's reality.

This plenary will explore alternative conceptions of living the growing cultural diversity within Europe. How to reconcile a respect for different cultural identities while, at the same time, aiming for shared ground rules, values and guidelines which promote social justice, cohesion and stability. Based on the discussions and lessons of the previous days, participants will be encouraged to create their vision of a common future and to identify steps towards practical realization.

### **31<sup>st</sup> July 2011: Conclusion and follow-up**

The final plenary will summarize what has been discussed and learnt during the panels, training modules, discussion groups and dialogue processes. After a short presentation of different outcomes, we will work on next steps and create a platform where initiatives – on an individual or wider level – could emerge and be launched. We will also present possibilities for conference follow-up in different European countries during the coming year. All input, ideas, contributions and encouragement are welcome. Finally, we would like to celebrate intensive and inspiring conference days in the belief that another world is possible.

### **Conference 'behind the scenes'**

In addition to the official programme, there will be time-slots for diaspora and other groups to organize their own meetings or round-tables. It is each group's own responsibility to seize this opportunity. The conference team will provide rooms and – if needed – experienced facilitators for the discussions. For more information please contact: [nina.frei@caux.ch](mailto:nina.frei@caux.ch)

### **Peace Fair**

One evening, organizations, initiatives or communities working in diasporas, peace, fundamental rights and/or intercultural dialogue, will have the opportunity to present their work and projects. For further information please contact: [nina.frei@caux.ch](mailto:nina.frei@caux.ch)

### **Who should attend?**

- Members of diaspora communities who wish to make an impact on peace and reconciliation work in their host society, their home country and their community.

- Experts, practitioners and activists in the field of peacebuilding, reconciliation and fundamental rights, who will be presented with reflection, case studies and tools to enhance their professional work.
- Organizations at national, regional and local level such as government agencies, cultural institutions, community workers, as well as NGOs and associations which focus on peacebuilding, conflict transformation and fundamental rights.
- Students and young adults who wish to take responsibility for better intercultural understanding.
- Teachers and adult educators who are working in an intercultural environment.
- People who want to start their own peace initiatives and are aware of the challenges and opportunities of a multicultural society.

#### **Intended outcomes**

- Defining fields of action in which joint commitment is needed.
- Empowering participants to start their own projects and initiatives.
- Sharing experiences between Initiatives of Change and other organizations.