

REARMEMENT MORAL · CAUX

Centre de Rencontres Internationales

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TÉLÉGRAMME CAUXVAUD

MOUNTAIN HOUSE
RUE DU PANOPAMA
CH - 1824 CAUX

Monday, 15th August, 1994

Dear friends,

The unmistakable signs of autumn are reminding us that time is passing, and another summer is moving towards its close. The mornings are darker. The leaves are turning, helped by drought and the exceptional heat of the summer. The wild fruits are ripening - on last Monday's outing I feasted on my first wild raspberries. The house has seen one of its largest, swiftest change-overs in recent years, with some 300 leaving at the close of the 'women's initiative' and another 300 arriving for the 'regions' session, and the impossible task is even more impossible than usual.

The variety, the colour, the life. The afternoon and evening of prayer and voluntary fasting, the morning times of prayer and introduction to different faiths, the vast mosaic of deeply lived-out experience... The pain - and gracious forgiveness - of an Aboriginal woman forcibly taken away from her family, and brought up in the 'white world'. The pain of illegitimacy, and a passionate plea not to carry such problems on from one generation to another. The rare quality of the community meetings in Caux; the use of symbols; the music and poetry. Francis Bebey, one of the great musical entertainers of Africa, in concert, playing the music of the pygmies - 'I was taught that they were savages, but then I learnt that the savages live in cities' - and an African tale of creation, with God overcoming his boredom through music, and his notes creating the world. The diplomats - the Tanzanian ambassador to Geneva, and the Swiss ambassador to Tanzania, both brought here by the powerful Tanzanian group; the Kenyan and Czech ambassadors. The many articles in the local press, and a news item on the radio, the journalists ringing for more news and background material; two new books launched, one by Michael Henderson, the other by Hélène Guisan; the visits out into the country, to the Red Cross, to a contemplative order of nuns, to a centre for handicapped children, to a village, into the life of Switzerland as never before. So many moments of magic, and so much more that I have only half-heard, half-felt, or missed completely!

Women from many parts of the world and from very different backgrounds have shared from their experiences, their sufferings, their hopes - and their new discoveries. One highlight was a session on 'Transforming suffering', where two mothers shared their deepest pains: one had lost her son and daughter-in-law to drugs and then AIDS, and is now caring for her grandson, the other's son had committed suicide. The wife of a Somali political leader told how she had had to hide herself for 50 days from an enemy clan. 'I was so afraid that I asked God to die rather than be taken prisoner,' she said. 'But during my stay here in Caux I have learnt the value and the necessity of forgiveness. I want to forgive those in the other camp, and ask for their forgiveness when I return home,' she concluded.

From Northern Ireland came another testimony of hope. 'If I do something, it is because of my love for my children, and my love for all the children of my country,' said one of the organizers of a Belfast women's peace organization. 'I am as responsible as anyone else for the Ireland that we will leave to our children,' she went on. A Protestant from Belfast, she had married a Catholic, whose family had

been the target of a loyalist terrorist attack. After some time living outside Ireland, they had decided together to return and work for an end to the suffering and divisions. 'One of the biggest obstacles to overcome in my work for peace is apathy,' she said. 'A whole generation has grown up in an atmosphere of violence, and feel that it's normal. We blame the terrorists, the politicians, the bigots. I often hear people say, "If only someone would do something." I say to them, "And what if that someone is you?" We know that there is no other way to find peace than to look into ourselves, to face our own feelings of hatred and our prejudices, to forgive, and to work together in our families, our cities and our country to build a society where our children can have a future.'

One of the founders of an Israeli organization, 'Women in Black' spoke about her work for reconciliation. For a long time she had worked for reconciliation between Jews and Palestinians, but she wanted to speak about the work of reconciling moderate and extremist Jews. 'These extremists are not violent just towards Palestinians, but also towards Jews,' she said. She herself had received threats. A dialogue had been opened, despite the terrible massacre in Hebron. 'Here we change our viewpoint, our perspective,' said a woman from Lebanon. 'What seemed important and difficult changes in the light of the experiences of others. One thing is sure: I'm no longer the same person. I'm ready to change, to accept the other person, and to listen.'

Mrs Anna Abdallah Msekwa, Minister of State in the Office of the Tanzanian Prime Minister, and one of the initiators of the 'women's initiative', was one of a delegation from the conference which was received for more than an hour at the Municipality of Lausanne by the first woman from the Radical Party to be elected to the Municipality, who is responsible for the schools of Lausanne.

The 'women's initiative' closed with a six-point charter, with the title 'Creating peace'. 'Peace will come when we each are thinking for the other person and the other culture, religion and the other nation,' the charter opens. 'We cannot create peace without giving up something ourselves. Peace begins with me.' Then follow six steps: 'Live on the basis of appreciation, not comparison,' 'Be honest with ourselves about our own shortcomings and ask for the help of friends we trust to overcome them,' 'Live for the seventh generation of those yet unborn,' 'Take time to listen, have courage to obey,' 'Pay special attention to what happens to people around us,' and 'Seek understanding of those who think differently from ourselves, and speak truth to those who think the same.'

It wasn't just words. The last two meetings saw that typical Caux mixture of the personal and the global - 'from vision to action' - of individual change, change in homes and families, at work, with colleagues, between racial and ethnic groups. 'I came to save the world, but I've learnt I have to change myself,' said a Spanish-American woman. She was separated from her husband. 'He tried to ask for forgiveness,' she said, but she'd spurned him. In Caux, God had said to her that she had to ask for his forgiveness, and she had done so by telephone. 'I've found inner peace. Thank you from the bottom of my heart,' she said.

I could start on the next session, but space has run out, and I don't want to give you indigestion! It will have to wait until next week.

Warm greetings from an autumnal Caux,

Andrew Stallybrass