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COEXISTENCES / JUNE 2022

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Even though two years of COVID forced us to postpone certain projects we have not been inactive. Fiuna Seylan Ongen and Laurent Enser, in particular, have continued working on the exciting project “Reinforcing mediators of the conflict”. A group of 20 people will be coming from 4 to 13 September to Switzerland, the host families have already been contacted and that will give us the opportunity to meet each other after the summer break.

The TALI project which was well advanced was unfortunately postponed, despite the unwavering energy of Daniela Hersch here and Eva Halachmi in Israel.

Our General Assembly in April was very animated. It was good to see how happy everybody felt to meet again “for real”.

We hope that the projects which are well under way will take place and that the newcomers to the committee will infuse fresh energy into our association which does not lack any!

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GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2022

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The General Assembly took place on 11 April 2022 at the Frat' in Lausanne in a very convivial atmosphere.

Certain changes were made to the committee: as announced at the last General Assembly, Christian Sinobas, our treasurer, was replaced by Valérie Jennings on 1 January 2022. Christian was there to present the 2021 accounts and signal the 600 hours voluntary work carried out by the active members of the association. Sandra Modiano leaves the committee after two years and will be replaced by Nathalie Katz Lachavanne. Nastasia Binotto will be leaving the committee and the secretariat and so this position has to be filled.

The committee and the President warmly thank Nastasia, Sandra and Christian for their commitment. The committee is composed as follows for the period 2022-2024: Fiuna Seylan Ongen (President), Valérie Jennings (Treasurer), Halina Sandri, Delphine Friedmann, Nathalie Katz Lachavanne and Laurent Enser.

Another impending change is that of Dominique Benmuvhar who is retiring from the organisation of the fundraising dinner. We thank Dominique most warmly for her commitment over all these years. For more than ten years the fundraising dinner has made it possible to raise funds and offer a special convivial moment, representing an important annual event for the internal life of Coexistences. We hope to find a solution in order to maintain this popular event.

The eagerly awaited time has come to present certain projects. First of all the bad news, then the good.

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TALI PROGRAMME POSTPONED UNTIL NEXT YEAR

The principals of the schools involved in the Coexistences project have reiterated their wish to come to Switzerland. However, in view of the age of the participants and a still rather anxiety-provoking situation linked to the Covid, they prefer to put it off and come in 2023. We would point out that TALI has received the support of the European Union for three years, making it possible to increase the number of schools participating in the exchange programme between Jewish and Arab school children established in Galilee, which have risen from 26 to 38.

BTI / 10 YEARS AND BTI NEW FORMULA

Three successive postponements have led François Feihl and Massimo Sandri, together with their Israel-Palestine partners, to transform the initial project and wait until 2025 (?) to celebrate the 15 years of BTI.

Since Breaking The Ice is a project that evolves and changes, following the withdrawal of the University of Haifa, Ulfat Haider is looking for a new partner there and has approached the Seminar Kibbutzim college, who want to integrate the BTI project in their curriculum by giving it credits. This college mainly trains primary and secondary school teachers. It is a mixed public institution situated in Tel-Aviv which delivers degrees equivalent to university Bachelor and Master degrees.

In the past BTI projects, the participants joined the programme as volunteers. The new BTI project differs in the sense that the programme will be part of the participant's academic studies thanks to the awarded credits. To validate the launching of this new BTI project, we are waiting for feedback from the college to know how many students have signed up for this course this year. If all goes well, and according to the latest news things are progressing positively, it will take place from 15 to 26 September 2022.

REINFORCING THE MEDIATORS OF THE CONFLICT

This project, mainly led by Fiuna Seylan Ongen and Laurent Enser, has met with a very encouraging development. For the first time, this is not a proposal for hosting an existing dialogue group, but to help to create a group of the conflict mediators who work on the ground often without knowing each other or sharing their experience and who could consequently gain from their meetings and exchanges. When we celebrated the 10 years of Coexistences in Israel, we realised and deplored how often and to what extent each person worked in isolation.

A PROJECT CREATED TOGETHER

The broad outlines of the project were drawn up after having taken into account the replies given by our partners to an on-line survey. So this is a project established together, elaborated in detail with three Israel-Palestinian mediators and Björn Krondorfer, an American academic who will lead the two seminars.

It will take place as follows: two seminars in Switzerland, organised at approximately one year's interval, three sessions on the ground are also scheduled (a first preparatory session, an intersession between the two seminars in Switzerland and a follow-up after the seminars).

PLANNING OF THE PROJECT IN FIVE STEPS

- 1 preparation on the ground (Bethlehem): 13-14 May 2022
- 2 first seminar in Switzerland: 4-13 September 2022
- 3 intersession on the ground: October 2022 – June 2023
- 4 second seminar in Switzerland: August-September 2023
- 5 follow-up on the ground/evaluation: as from September 2023

KEY OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

- 1 create a synergy between the dialogue of the Israeli-Palestinian mediators by enabling them to become familiar with the different dialogue approaches and learn from each another
- 2 address their practical and methodological preoccupations
- 3 present them new facilitation tools
- 4 expose them to other conflicts
- 5 create a support and mentoring network
- 6 offer them a revitalising week far from the place of the conflict

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COMPOSITION OF THE GROUP

About twenty people have joined up for the five steps of the project. At present the group composes of 60% Palestinians, 40% Israelis, 65% women and 35% men. Half of them have participated in Coexistences projects in Switzerland. These mediators are members of Sulha, Women in Movement, YMCA, David Yellin, Beit Hagefen, Natal, Jerusalem Youth Chorus, Roots, and Tech2Peace organisations among others.

BUDGET AND FUNDRAISING

Fiuna, Laurent and their group have made an incredible research for funds for this far-reaching project requiring an important budget. They have managed to obtain the funding for the entire project. The latter has given rise to great enthusiasm with organisations interested in this question. It has also had the support of an important State department, namely the DFAE (*Federal Department of Foreign Affairs*).

FIRST STEP OF THE PROJET / 13 AND 14 MAI 2022

Laurent Enser and Fiuna Seylan Ongen went to Jerusalem where they joined Björn Krondorfer and the 17 people who were able to participate in this meeting which took place at the same time as the tragic funeral of the journalist Shireen Abu Aqleh. An interpreter was also present to help those who needed a translation.

The dynamics of the group was built up and distinctly consolidated at the end of the second day. The participants regret that too many months separate this from the seminar in Switzerland (due to Bjorn's agenda). But a WhatsApp group has been created and already serves as an exchange support.

Björn Krondorfer established a relation of confidence with the group members: he is respected and appreciated in particular for his humble approach. The group is varied by their different number of years' experience but with a clear commitment from everyone.

Huda Abu Arqub, the regional Director of the Alliance for Middle East Peace, came to talk about her vision of the needs on the ground. Succinctly, here is, what she said:

- Identities and narratives are central to the conflict: the creation of fear through outside pressures paralyses the capacity to define one's identity and it is necessary to create protected spaces of confidence, where one can form one's own narratives in order to develop the participants' confidence in their own capacities, including that of surviving.
- Victimisation is a pivotal part of the conflict. The oppressor like the oppressed compete to claim the biggest victimisation. Liberation of the oppressed can take the form either by liberating oneself from one's fear and inflicting suffering in return (vengeance), or liberating oneself and liberating those who oppress them from their fears. For peace to come about, it is imperative to liberate oneself from victimisation.
- Building peace means breaking the cycle of violence and contributing to redefining the power relations, the narratives/stories, ...
- The mediators are people who educate and seek to eliminate victimisation. They must be united rather than opposed.

In conclusion, the meeting went very well and the people present, happy to have participated, are impatient to meet again in Switzerland in September. "Thanks Coexistences for organizing a meaningful seminar!"

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COEXISTENCES - REFLECTION ON A STRATEGY

In order to compensate a reduction in active members in the transversal activities and a slow renewal of its members, whereas the number of projects is not decreasing, Fiuna Seylan Ongen thinks it is important to initiate a reflection on a medium-term strategy (5 years). Thanks to the new project "Reinforce the mediators of the conflict", the association has attained an important status and visibility. However, it needs a solid structure and to renew its active members in order to realise this type of projects in the future.

During the General Assembly, Fiuna Seylan Ongen proposed the launching of a collective work for a medium-term strategy with a group of those interested, beyond the committee (on the model of the enlarged committee). Following an animated discussion, Delphine Friedman, André Katz, Muriel Katz, Nathalie Katz-Lachavanne, Massimo Sandri led by Laurent Douek volunteered to form a work group which will propose certain strategic guidelines for reflection to the committee.

This is the latest news before the summer break. We wish you a lovely summer and look forward to meeting you again in September.

The communication group

English translation: Jenny Rice