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COEXISTENCES / NOVEMBER 2022

coexistences

SUPPORTING THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN DIALOGUE
RECOGNISED OF PUBLIC INTEREST

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Coexistences is as alive as ever after the long pause imposed by the pandemic. In this month of October adorned with the colours of an Indian summer, we return to the two projects which have taken place recently. Several of our members have been active to ensure that they went well. You were able to learn more if you came to our fundraising dinner on 6 November which took place at the parish centre in Bussigny. The end of the year announces the return of the great Ball with the Orchestre Jaune which this time will take place at a later date: 24 February 2023. Be prepared!

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STRENGTHENING THE FACILITATORS OF THE CONFLICT

For those of you who have not followed the previous episodes, here is a short recap: this innovative project was conceived two years ago in the aim to help create a group of mediators of the conflict who work on the ground, often not knowing each other and without sharing their experiences.

The outline of the project was elaborated after taking into consideration our partners' replies to an online survey. It is centred on two symposiums in Switzerland.

The first of these symposiums just took place from 4 to 13 September. It brought together seven male mediators and ten female mediators, of which ten Palestinians (from Israel, from Jerusalem and from the Territories) and seven Israeli Jews. You were able to meet them on the eve of their departure on 12 September at an evening organised in the CPO in Lausanne during which we had the pleasure to receive a delegation from the FDFA (Federal Department of Foreign Affairs) which supports the project, as well as Mehra Rimer co-founder and President of B8 of Hope.

As planned, the discussions were led by the American academic Björn Krondorfer, of German origin, and a simultaneous translation was ensured by two interpreters. The observations, feedback, the wish list and the intentions of these professionals indicate that several global objectives of the project have truly been initiated:

1. Create a synergy by acquainting themselves with different approaches and learning from each other

A dynamic emerged and two groups have already been formed, one group comprising a minimum of six people with a long practical experience in facilitation and conceptual skills, the other group comprising four people in their thirties having practised facilitation but also and above all active in project programming.

2. Respond to practical and/or methodological concerns

The discussion centred on key subjects: facilitation through activities such as sport, music; trauma and healing; building safe places; facilitating in times of crisis. Discussions will take place arising from readings.

3. Present new facilitation tools and learn from other conflict zones

The question of new tools has become secondary in relation to other more important themes. Learning from other conflicts: the presentation of the delegate from the mediation department of the FDFA talked about the different dimensions of Swiss mediation tradition, as well as their experience in the mediation of conflicts in Nigeria and Zimbabwe; this presentation generated a great interest.

4. Create an emulation or even partnerships between different initiatives

There is a real interest among the members of the group and a willingness to collaborate at an individual level.

5. Create a support and mentoring network

A group dynamic clearly emerged and at the next meeting the following question will be debated: how can the group be a supportive space in turbulent times in the West Bank given the results of the new elections in Israel which do not augur well for the peace camp? The activities of the two groups are promising, the participants having committed themselves to each other.

6. Offer a restorative and inspiring week

Being outside of one's usual surroundings, in another space, is most certainly beneficial. We would not have reached the same result by staying on the ground.

From Coexistences' traditional point of view of hosting, the stay went very well: the chalet was comfortable, hiring a cook was a wise decision, the attributions between the families and the participants worked out well, everything went smoothly with the PC, the meeting places in Lausanne were good, as were the two excursions to Château d'Ex and Lausanne.

As for Coexistences, the project was supported from a distance by Laurent Enser and on the spot by Fiuna Seylan-Ongen with the precious help of Edgar and Danielle Bloch as well as Massimo Sandri. Several members of the association helped to fetch the arrivals of the delayed participants.

At the end of the symposium, the participants expressed their satisfaction at having taken part in a symposium which responds to a genuine need, said they were privileged to be part of an excellent group in which they can learn from each other, felt grateful and appreciative.

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Beyond the obvious satisfaction of seeing this project materialise, we remain realistic and take measure of all the difficulties encountered which are as many challenges to overcome to ensure the sustainability of this action, in particular: the necessity to take time and work in a more deliberate way in order to create a climate of confidence between the members of the group, the difficulty to facilitate professionals of facilitation, the difficulty to create a coherence in a heterogeneous group, the difficulty to make it possible for the group to appropriate the project, the difficulty for Coexistences to keep the right distance.

An assessment questionnaire has been sent to all the participants and the results are expected at the beginning of November.

The next stages planned for this ambitious project are: a meeting on the ground at the end of January 2023 to review the different initiatives and activities of the monthly meetings between the mediators participating in the project. Then, in summer 2023, a second symposium in Switzerland.

We warmly thank the members of the work group, the twelve host families and the entities and foundations which make it possible to realise this important project for the sector: the Peace and Human Rights division of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, B8 of Hope, the G. Hirzel Foundation, Sandoz, Dafodyle, Moser and Waechter as well as the Canton of Vaud via the Civil Protection.

FIJUNA SEYLAN ONGEN AND LAURENT ENSER

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ABOVE: BJÖRN KRONDORFER (FACILITATOR) AND ZAHAVA NEUBERGER / AMEERA SAID AND KHALED RISHEK
BELOW: SHOSHANA GOTTESMAN AND SIHAM FAYYAD / JESSICA MARTIN AND SHIMON BEN NAIM (INTERPRETERS)
PHOTOS: LEONARD ROSSI

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ABOVE: RINA BUBEROGLU AND ULFAT HAIDER / YAKIR RENBAUM AND JAKE SHAPIRO
BELOW: AMAL ABBAS AND YAIR SERI / KHWALA AL TOURI AND MICHAL LEVIN
PHOTOS: LEONARD ROSSI

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ABOVE: SABER RABI, SAMAH DARWISH, ZAHAVA NEUBERGER AND NOOR AWAD / PHOTO: LÉONARD ROSSI
AT SAUVABELIN, FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: YAKIR RENBAUM, AMEERA SAÏD, SAMAH DARWISH, BJÖRN KRONDORFER, AMAL ABBAS, ULFAT HAIDER, MICHAL LEVIN, JESSICA MARTIN, KHALED RISHEK, ZAHAVA NEUBERGER, RINA BUBEROGLU, NOOR AWAD
IN FRONT: SABER RABI AND JAKE SHAPIRO / PHOTO: FIUNA SEYLAN ONGEN

BREAKING THE ICE

It was in summer of 2019 that Breaking the Ice (BTI) took place for the last time. At the end of that year, the University of Haifa withdrew from the project. Ulfat Haider had started looking for new institutional partners, but in March 2020 the pandemic blocked everything.

At the beginning of 2022 the situation eased on the sanitary front and she started once again her search and soon a new institution declared their interest. This institution is the Kibbutzim College, a public university centre devoted in particular to the training of teachers and situated in Tel-Aviv. The Coexistences Committee started negotiations which in May brought about a partnership agreement quite similar the one which existed with Haifa University, especially concerning the sharing of expenses. Beit Hagefen, which is Ulfat's employer, remain involved. A new element: the participation in BTI will receive an academic recognition in the form of credit allocations.

Whereas formerly the recruiting of participants could begin at the start of the year, this time it can only begin in May. This raises a double concern: on the one hand, only six valid applications can be retained, exclusively feminine, with a certain disparity (two Jewish girls and four Arab girls); on the other, the time available for the formation of the group and their training in Israel is abnormally short. In effect, at the end of the preparatory week-ends, the participants are unable to walk for several hours with a heavy backpacks required for a self-sufficiency trek and nights under tents. They are however very motivated, with a group dynamics well underway. For this reason and taking into account the short period of the existence of the partnership with the Kibbutzim College, it was decided to maintain the trip.

The formula is however adapted, replacing the trek by day excursions from a fixed point, making it possible for the backpacks to be considerably lighter. The facilitation is ensured by Ulfat as usual and by Oren Zindenberg, her Jewish partner who is a professor at the Kibbutzim College. Our habitual guide, Nadja Schmid, will be there. Her deep understanding of the project and her absolute relation of confidence with Ulfat makes her irreplaceable.

Scheduled to arrive in Switzerland on 16 September, the six participants only arrived in Geneva on the following day because of a problem with the plane tickets. They were taken by bus to La Fouly, where, for almost all of their stay, they were accommodated in the chalet provided by Danielle and Pierre Kohler. From 18 to 26 September, they made daily walks of 4 to 6 hours, sometimes leaving directly on foot and at others they were driven to a starting point further afield. For example, one day the participants were dropped off at the Great Saint Bernard Hospice, crossed over the Italian border (a significant experience of a frontier with no police control) and came back on foot to La Fouly by the Ferret pass. The evenings were spent in the chalet, with some exceptions. In particular, so that they could become acquainted with high mountains, on the 24th we led them to the Orny hut (altitude 2800 m) where they spent the night, descending the following day by the Ferret valley with a stop by the tongue of the Orny glacier.

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The walks were punctuated by structured dialogue activities which took place after the evening meal. Similarly to the other years, the group agreed for me to attend as a listener. I am therefore in a position to appreciate the professionalism of the facilitation ensured by Ulfat and Oren. The group was guided with sensitivity and empathy from building up friendly relations to a curiosity of the other, leading to the possibility to discuss, with respect, the hardest subjects.

On the evening of the 19th, Edgar Bloch came to the chalet to give a talk on the Swiss political system by adopting a historical perspective which captured the interest of the audience. On the 27th, a raclette (hot scraped cheese) meal at the Restaurant of the Glaciers in La Fouly and, to our great pleasure, in the company of Jean Troillet who guided our first ascension of the Mont Blanc 13 years ago, and Luc Sergy, former director of the company Securitas Direct, one of our main sponsors. On the 28th, a farewell party in Lausanne, hosted by Danielle and Pierre Kohler (once again!) at their domicile chemin du Trabandan. For their last night in Switzerland, the group were accommodated in the gymnasium of the Valentin Catholic School, and on the 29th they took the train to Geneva airport.

However, the project is not over as Ulfat and Oren have already arranged with the participants a date to meet in Israel at the end of October, in order to see how to enable their entourage to benefit from their recent experience, for example within the Kibbutzim College by helping to recruit a new group for next year.



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A remark to conclude: something new as regards the former years, the less physically demanding format made it possible for some members of Coexistences to walk with the group for one, two, or three days. This opportunity to get to know the participants better and live « from the inside » the atmosphere of the group was highly appreciated. Finally, it is important to mention and warmly thank all those who helped to make this this project possible:

Danielle and Pierre Kohler, who not only made their chalet La Fouly available, but hosted the farewell party in their residence in Lausanne, even offering the wine;

Ahmad Abu Nijmeh, who:

- provided the 16-seat bus belonging to the Valentin Catholic School,
- accommodated the group on the premises of the School for the last night in Switzerland,
- offered the group the midday meal and breakfast for the last two days in Lausanne ;

Maurice and Mauricette Amiot, owners of the Auberge des Glaciers at La Fouly, who offered the raclette-meal on the last evening in La Fouly ;

The Municipality of Orsières, represented by Mrs Dominique Coppey, who offered the aperitif before the raclette-meal, and made a welcome speech;

Jacques Cloutier, owner of Zanskar Sport shop at La Fouly, for his technical help, his kindness and hospitality. Jacques made available his spare room for the members of Coexistences who wanted to walk with the group.

FRANÇOIS FEIHL



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: LIHI ZIDENBERG F, NIRVANA ANGAS, DOUNA JUMAH, NADJA SCHMID, ULFAT HAIDER, RIMA AKEL, KHEN APSIS AND SALI SMARAH
PHOTOS: FRANÇOIS FEIHL

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ABOVE: KHEN APSIS SITTING ON THE BORDER STONE
PHOTOS: FRANÇOIS FEIHL

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ABOVE: SALI SMARAH AND NIRVANA ANGAS / KHEN APSIS AND LIHI ZIDENBERG
BELOW: DOUNA JUMAH ET RIMA AKEL / FROM FRONT TO TOP: KHEN APSIS AND NIRVANA ANGAS, RIMA AKEL AND LIHI ZIDENBERG, DOUNA JUMAH AND SALI SMARAH
PHOTOS: ALAIN KISSLING

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JOBS VACANCIES: SECRETARIAT AND TREASURY

As you probably know, Nastasia Binotto retired from the secretariat at the beginning of the year. We are still looking for someone to fill this post. This is an important task for which the specifications and an estimation of the time required have been assessed and an indemnity is envisaged. The post of treasurer to replace Valerie Jennings is also to be filled at the end of the year. There again, this is a key position for our association.

Please help us find their replacements either by committing yourself or spreading the word around you.

Candidacies can be addressed to the President (f.seylan-ongen@coexistences.ch) or to one of the committee members. We are counting on you to help us have the means to continue in optimal conditions.

COMMUNICATION

The Swiss platform for the promotion of peace or KOFF, founded and financed mainly by the FDFA, assembles 40 NGOs involved in this action through their programmes in conflict zones. KOFF publishes a journal five times a year which is also available online at the address: www.swisspeace.ch

As their last publication centred on the Middle East and North Africa, Fiuna Seylan Ongen was asked to describe our action. As the format is limited to 3000 signs, she chose to develop one of Coexistences' actions and write about the project «Strengthening the dynamic between facilitators of Israeli-Palestinian dialogue».

EVENTS

The fundraising dinner

This took place on 6 November 2022 at the parish centre in Bussigny, the music was proposed by the Malax group. It was a pleasure to all meet once again and be together, the meal was delicious and the music excellent. Thank you to André and Muriel Katz, as well as the Malax group, Laurent Douek on the chromatic harmonica, Arnaud Racine on the guitar and for the arrangements, Carlo Bounous on the bass and Alexis Wintsch on the drums and percussions, for this truly enjoyable evening.

Meeting with Bassam Aramim and Rami Elhanan from the Bereaved Parents Forum (former co-directors) on Saturday 19 November around 18h30 at the Espace Dickens. The meeting will be led by Laurent Douek.

New Year Grand Ball 2023

Due to works in the Montbenon Casino during the month of January, the ball 2023 with the Orchestre Jaune will take place on 24 February, i.e. the Friday following the February half-term. Don't forget to note this date in your agenda as we are counting on your help and presence. After two years without dancing your legs must be tingling!

LE GROUPE COMMUNICATION