

DEAR FRIENDS, MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS OF COEXISTENCES

VISIT OF THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS (FEBRUARY 16 TO 24)

The visit has just ended and has been a great success in many ways.

As a reminder, this group of religious leaders was truly bringing together the vast majority of the religious leaders of each of the 4 religions (Jewish, Christian, Druze, Muslim and their sub-trends) that are present in Israel. These leaders have judiciary roles and their court of justice statute on family matters. Together they lead about 700'000 people or about 10 % of the population in Israel.

THE OBJECTIVES OF THE STAY WERE TO:

- give them a platform for dialogue
- expand their academical knowledge
- through them reach out with the message of coexistence to the 700'000 people they lead

DIALOGUE

This week of 24/7 coexistence in the relatively isolated Cret-Berard has transformed a group of students into a group of friends, even brothers according to many within the group. Their interviews on the radio "Hautes Frequences" of Sunday 14th are a testimony to that (it can be podcasted from the following internet link: <http://www.rsr.ch/la-1ere/hautes-frequences>).

Throughout the numerous working sessions between the religious leaders, spontaneous discussions and meetings took place between the various religions as well as within religious families (between reformed and orthodox Jews, Druzes and Muslims) something remarkable enough to be mentioned. Everyone could therefore get to know better the other ones and become better known. The relative simplicity of Cret Berard (collective bathrooms for most of the group) and unusual events (visit of the town of Gruyères on a frozen day) are some of the shared souvenirs that now unite this group. We could also see that they shared many similar views on many aspects of coexistence within the Israeli society. Even if this has not resulted in a joint statement, their intention to meet again very soon in Eilat and the many intercommunitary projects that emerged from the working sessions are a clear sign that this trip abroad, initially an end study trip, turns out to be the beginning of a new chapter in their lives, the story of a great friendship reaching across the boundaries of ethnical groups and communities so they will be able to share their preoccupations as leaders and will have now friends they can turn to for

insights. The breadth and ambitions of these projects go well beyond the initial plan to work on a common project upon their return (on the minorities rights in Israel).

EXPOSURE

The objective to broaden their perspective has been fully met and the group says it is very satisfied. The meetings and presentations tackled the issues of relations between civil and religious law in Europe, through the following themes:

- At the Comparative Law Institute:
Starting from "To what extent a state can or must change its laws in light of religious demands of religious communities living within its borders", our guests have discovered that in Switzerland the religious law have no impact on civil law. In contrast, the many Swiss attending the event have realised the breadth of challenges that the pluri-religious nature of the Israeli society opens.
- At the University of Lausanne: presentation of a religious crisis exit: the edict of Nantes.
- Roundtable about the stakes of interreligious dialogue to promote social peace and sharing founding principles and common values to the four religions, with speeches by Rabi Guedj, M. H. Ouairi, Jan de Haas et general vicaire Rémy Berchier.
- A visit to the Federal Tribunal highlighted the differences between Switzerland and Israel on the matter of religious and civil law. Yet the Federal Tribunal judges have also indicated that more religious questions arise and tackle school (the cross), the public space (the head cover), the territory (cimetaries) etc

TESTIMONY

The message of dialogue and coexistence through dialogue was strongly promoted throughout the stay, among other at the Friday prayer in the Islamic center of Prilly by Sheikh Kadi A. Samara on Friday 19 March in front a wide audience. After speaking about the necessity of integration, of abiding by the laws of the host country, he spoke extensively of coexistence, of the necessity to dialogue and the possibilities of peace that dialogue can open.

The group's faculty head Benzi Lahav has expressed with great warmth his great satisfaction of a very successful stay. Like all the others we host here, he has said how from a personal view as well as speaking in the name of the group, everyone in the group had been greatly moved by the dedication we have showed for a cause which seem so far away

from our daily concerns. He also spoke of this fantastic feeling of being pampered to the last details and very smoothly throughout a long and busy stay. Our deepest thanks and congratulations to all those (15 people!) who have worked so hard behind the scene with such perfection!

We could also witness remarkable sharing moments, such as the Shabbat that the reformed rabbi Adi COHEN opened so graciously to all those (women and men) who wished to join him, explaining the meaning of each sequence of the ceremony. One could see muslim and christians leaders along side members of Coexistences sharing a prayer in full understanding of its meaning. This sharing and joint prayer happened again with the service led by the pasteur Antoine Reymond. Last but not least this lovely and so highly symbolic task: cutting out a card from Cret Berard in 19 pieces that were given to each of the participants. For their action to continue, they will have to meet again, rebuild the card and send it to Coexistences.

Our association Coexistences was awarded the 2d prize of the geneve association "Entre Connaissance" headed by Rafid Ouairi (former spokesman of the Mosque of Geneva). The association aims at building exchanges between the islamic civilisation and the rest of the world and work for greater knowledge and understanding between the cultures and the people. The Friday prayer at the islamic center of Prilly could open to a collaboration with the muslim community of Lausanne. We also count new members, among other Antoine Reymond who, together with Peleg Amir and Marcel Cohen-Dumani, has played a central role in making the stay possible.

Last but certainly not least, we now also count among our members Sheikh Rayan Kamal (member of the Al Aqsa association and as such a spiritual leader of prime importance for the muslim community of Israël). HEaring that we were facing difficulties in recruiting muslims and/or palestiniens, became a new member on the first day of the stay!

MONT BLANC EXPEDITION (END JULY)

The project is progressing with new sponsorships, however a significant part of the budget remains to be found through various events (among others a sponsored dinner) Contacts have been taken in the media to publicize the event, in Switzerland as well as in Israël. In Haïfa, the group is being formed. We will get to know Doron Erel, the israeli mountain climber, during his conférence the 26 of March. Details of the project can be viewed on:

www.coexistences.ch

Contacts

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YOUTH GROUP (EARLY JULY)

The 2 groups, one mix and one the girls all aged 16, work really well. We will tell you more in our next Newsletter with pictures from Jerusalem. The "Host families" group will start working very soon to organise their stay

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The new groups of parents also works very well and we will also give you more news next month.

The COCONUTS group, after ending their meeting cycle in February, continue to meet at the "Y Café" which they organise themselves every month. Clearly this group has matured as a real group during their stay here and has now become a group of real friends. Even if no group is like another one, the trip abroad is a key moment in building very strong relations of friendships that cut across the boundaries of the communities

OTHER NEWS

Our internet site is now available in english too!

Sincerely yours

Fiuna Seylan-Ongen, groupe « communication »