

**DEAR FRIENDS, SUPPORTERS AND MEMBERS,
IT IS ALMOST THE END OF THE SUMMER AND WE HAVE JUST CLOSED THE SECOND
PART OF OUR 2010 ACTIVITIES WITH THE 2 TRIPS PLANNED.**



TWO MEMBERS OF PEACE BOMB, FIGHTING FOR TOLERANCE (PICTURE: ALAIN KISSLING)



AT THE TOP OF THE MONT-BLANC (PICTURE: FRANÇOIS FEIHL)

PEACE BOMB, FIGHTING FOR TOLERANCE, JUNE 29 AND JULY 8

The 2010 youth group of the YMCA, which named itself « Peace bomb, fighting for tolerance » has had a very successful stay in Switzerland between June 29 and July 8.

A group of incredible energy, light hearted and dynamism, composed of 9 boys and 7 girls, 6 Israeli and 10 Palestinians between 15 and 17 years old erupted in our lives. We had heard they were working incredibly well since the beginning of the encounters and we could see that by ourselves. Besides an almost equal numbers of boys and girls, and an unusual unequal number of Palestinians and Israelis, it is the first group since we have started hosting which made a conscious decision to only state their names and age during their presentation. Their decision not to mention religion or nationality was a conscious choice, as we know that the debates during the working sessions were very alive and oppositional at times.

PROGRAM OF THE TRIP

They arrived in the evening of the 29th and left directly for the Diablerets mountain resort where, during 3 days, they were initiated to walking and to the beauty of nature and of mountain by François Feihl.

In Lausanne, they got to visit the city and its' main landmark: the cathedral, the Hopper exhibition at l'Hermitage museum, Lausanne's synagogue, did some water cycling on the lake, and spent a full day with their host families. The youth were also initiated this year with great enthusiasm to capoeira by the Academy of Capoeira of Lausanne. A unique energizing choreographed fight, capoeira is a Brazilian martial art disguised in dance (as the slaves were forbidden to learn any form of fighting and defense) accompanied by singing and a good dose of ethic (meeting and respect of the opponent, the good of effort, giving oneself without expecting anything).

The youth also discovered Geneva through formal visits (the Mosque and the Red Cross museum) and the always popular discovery game which took them through the park of the Bastion and the Reformists' Wall, the St Pierre Cathedral and the chapel of the Maccabées, the old city, the Flower Clock, the globes and of course the water fountain. They met and discussed with rabbi Guedj, the former spokesman of the Geneva Mosque Hafid Ouardiri and abbot Arbey. Besides the rarity of seeing side by side a rabbi, a Muslim and an abbot engaged in a clearly friendly and

ancient dialog, the youth could ask questions. Some were about recent events (the meaning of the vote on the minarets) and some were very central to the understanding of peculiarities of faith (the nature of Jesus). Despite such a long program and a very early start, the day ended with two improvised and very lively football games. The second one opposed the youth to the host fathers and ended (for the host fathers) on an honorable score of 2-2.

CONCLUSION

As for each stay, the stay abroad in a peaceful and benevolent environment, has contributed to strengthening the cohesion of the group. The intense coexistence 24 hours a day has been catalysis for their friendship. What a pleasure it was for us to see "our" girls Siwar and Daisy chatting and whispering until late night, sharing the same bed night after night and being together during the day. We have had news

that the parting at Ben Gourion airport was emotionally difficult.

This summary would not be complete without a special mention of the facilitators Haneen and Ohad. The respect they won from the youth, the solid and sincere friendship they have one for the other and their great professionalism, enabled them to guide the group with high moral and spiritual authority. The peer-leaders Lihi and Lena (both who had participated to the 2008 YMCA summer trip) were precious helps and have demonstrated the lasting impact such an initiative in dialog can have.

The organization, which often gets little mention, was flawless and enabled a perfect stay. The new hosts' families integrated very well and took great pleasure to this first experience. To all, CONGRATULATIONS and a heartfelt THANK YOU!

CLIMBING THE MONT-BLANC, JULY 24 TO AUGUST 9

The second big project of this summer, « Breaking the Ice » constituted of 4 Palestinians, Malek, Lobna, Nadim, Shadi, and of 4 Israelis, Ori, Tomer, Shiri and Golan, who came hoping to climb the Mont-Blanc, will be the heights of this summer and of this year's activities. The group was remarkable, and the 8 made it to the summit on a sunny albeit very cold day. This great achievement opens many news opportunities for our association's action.

Very rigorously selected by Olfat Haider and Doron Erel to be up physically to this challenge, it was constituted of young students (25-30 yo) in the last years of university, mature and for the Israelis free from their moral debt to their country. They all had reached a very high sport level (basket, volley,) but more importantly came to share a genuine and sincere friendship and got very far in their discussions. Through the dialog sessions led on a daily basis by Olfat (her professional focus besides her sport credentials) and participating to the project, many gained a new perspective. We got to meet them on August 1st at La Fouly ski resort, where they were training, around the ever tasty food of Dominique Benmuvar et de Tatiana Honegger.

Even if the joy and the pride would not have been as complete as with the successful climb of the Mont-Blanc, the group considered that they had already achieved what they were here for: getting to meet the other, form lasting friendships, prove that working towards a common goal is possible for Palestinians and Israelis.

BACK HOME

Impacting upon their return being as important as successfully climbing the Mont-Blanc, here is what they have planned upon their return:

- talk about their experience in the media and in their respective communities;
- in pairs, tour Israeli and Palestinian schools to talk about the « Breaking the Ice » project and their experience;
- form mixed sport groups. Tomer and Shadi for example, who live in neighboring villages, plan to create a cycling group.

PRESS

The media coverage was excellent and balanced – radio, TV, print – Swiss and international: in Israel (Israeli and in Arabic), France, Italy, Canada, Turkey, etc. This should go on for a little while more.

The links below will give you a good snapshot of their stay, what they have experienced and images:

- Pascal Bourquin's report aired on the evening news on the TSR > see the video
- Philippe Dumartheray's 3 articles printed in the daily 24H > conquête du toit de l'Europe > Mont-Blanc > Israéliens et Palestiniens unis

More about their experience on Swissinfo.ch (widely used by other online news sites):

- > breaking the ice on Mont-Blanc

Links on our website

JEAN TROILLET

At the Alpine Film Festival of the Diablerets, where the youth and the film about their climb were presented, their mountain guide Jean Troillet received the Merit Award, amongst other for his essential participation to the project. It is a wonderful acknowledgment of his contribution and for what we advocate.

AND MORE

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Besides the plans of the youth, here are some further results of this project : the Haïfa University wishes to establish a partnership with Coexistences and build the project into a lasting program. Extensive contacts have been established with the cities of Chamonix, Annecy in France and Haïfa in Israel.

The Convention for the Alps, a protocol coordinating the alpine countries around the protection and the development of the alpine environment supported us officially, including financially. This opens up possibilities of getting support from the European Union around a project of transnational trekking through Italy- Switzerland-France to which the cities of Courmayeur and Aosta in Italy, Lausanne, Geneva, Sion here could be associated.

Pascal Bourquin will make a 15 minutes film and we are also considering a longer version for wider reach.

We will be weighing the new avenues opened by this project in the coming months.

With these encouraging news, we wish you a very good start and hope to see you at one of our upcoming meetings, among which the General Assembly of end October.

**With the warmest regards from the whole team,
Fiuna Seylan-Ongen, in the name of
the Communication group**