

**DEAR FRIENDS, MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS OF COEXISTENCES,
THE THREE GROUPS WE RECEIVED THIS YEAR WERE SUCCESSFULLY HOSTED AND
HAVE EACH ENRICHED OUR PERSPECTIVES.**



AVIR, JOHN AND WISSAM, NOOR AND LISA

• **THE SULHA GROUP, MAY 31- JUNE 10**

We hosted 15 of the facilitators who, since many years, facilitate the big gatherings (from 100 to 3'000 people) the NGO SULHA organizes in Israel between Jews, Arabs Israelis and Palestinians from the West Bank.

The group was striking by the harmonious relations that bound its members beyond the great age difference that existed (from 19 to 64 years old), the mutual trust, a clear affection for each other and a spiritual dimension rooted in a deep self-awareness that touched many of us.

After two days spent in their respective host families, they left for a few days in a chalet at the Diablerets. There they took the time to learn to know each other deeper and worked among other things on SULHA in the futur.

On the day of their return, a picnic was organized in the gorgeous Lavaux vineyards which were blessed with a wonderful summery weather. It was a superb setting for Coexistences members to help the group understand its commitment and this generosity that struck them.

The group visited the following day in Geneva the newly staged Red Cross Museum, and met for a discussion the inter religious dialog group of Hafid Ouardiri, great rabbi Guedj and the friar Arbey.

The younger ones from the group enjoyed Lausanne night life and on the last day of their stay, all together a musical farewell party was organized around a symbolical tribal fire contributed by both hosts and guests.

The objectives of the trip were fulfilled. That of getting to know each other better, to create within the group the dialog that these facilitators offer to the big SULHA gatherings, and to elaborate ways to reach out to more people back home.

The mood of the stay was captured in these terms: Gratitude, Crystallization, Hope, Regeneration, as elder being able to pass on the flame to the younger generation (and rest), Authenticity, being able to reflect on one's commitment, achieving the goals identified for the retreat in the mountain.

Here is what they wrote us once back:

Hamode (Nazareth, Israel)

Dear hosting family,

I prefer to say just family without hosting because actually I feel like I am at home!! No word to describe how much you give me a new good power and it is like I found my soul again. I want say thank every one of you, especially my family.

The experience of coexisting has given us a new experience to open our heart more and more for everything to the Sulha family. I come back to my land with big energy to do something to live and to make a change to those people who think that it is not hard to live together like humans. I take from every one small or big thing that I can use in my life.

I don't know how I should say thank you "Mercies' poco"... it will be not enough. Just for you to know that now you have a home here from the North until the South. And finally big special thanks to Elad Vazana who made this connection and to Nibal for all the preparing. LOVE you all.

Phull (Jericho, Palestine)

Dearest friends, my second family,
How are you doing? I already miss you. Hopefully you are doing fine. I want you to know that I feel like you are my second family :). I appreciate what you have done for me, and I wish one day if you are coming over to let us know so we can take care of you! I just back home after a long way passing six borders but I feel that I was in my home thank you for give us this opportunity to feel like that...

It was amazing when we (Sulha) started to call you mam and dad coz all of you were sooo nice with us... I had amazing days in Switzerland. These have been the best days for me with Sulha. We know more and more about ourselves and also about the others... We went back home much more connected than before thanks to all of you.

My warm and best regards for all of you.

Boaz (Neve Shalom, Israel)

Dear "Parents",
It has been already a few days since I returned home. The wonderful experience of being with you is still very vivid in my mind. The visit in Switzerland was for me very exciting and enjoyable. And I learned a lot from it.

To meet people like you, who are so dedicated for peace in our region, is something that cannot be taken for granted and serves as a model for me.

I thank you deeply for your generous and warm hospitality. And for the great time that we had together with you and your children.

You are always welcome in our home.
Yours

• **THE TALI-JCJCR GROUP, 8-15 JULY**

After the first group that came in 2011, a second seminar was organised this summer for a new group of teachers, members of the "Dialog and Identity" program.

These teachers participate in a pairing program of primary schools between the Jewish school network "Tali-JCJCR" and the catholic schools in Israel. 50% of students in the catholic schools are Muslims. During the school year 2012/2013, 14 schools (around 500 students) participated in this pairing program. It is a neighborhood program that pairs classes from one region. The 4 to 5 annual encounters take place in these schools and are facilitated by their teachers. These teachers, by dialoging and preparing together the encounters, are a living example for their students.

The content of these encounters is based on the premise that religions and cultures can be seen as shared elements instead of source of division. Concretely, the students present their religion and culture to their partners through games. To have to explain one's own practices and values to others leads actually to deepen knowledge of one's own culture.

The 14 women and 2 male teachers first spent 3 days in a chalet in Anzère. Besides the living together and hiking, they used the mornings and evenings for internal dialog sessions. They also had the opportunity to be introduced to the method used in Romandie for teaching religion.

Back to Lausanne, they were hosted in mixed pairs (one Jew, one Christian) in the host families. The last three days activities took place in the beautiful house for dialog L'Arzillier which was generously put to our disposition thanks to the minister Martin Hoegger. The presentation of the house for dialog by M. Hoegger, as well as a short history of Switzerland and its political system by Edgar Bloch received much attention. The teachers took part in a creative workshop offered by Anat Rosenwasser, art-therapist, around the theme of coexistence. On Saturday morning, two teachers, Dafi Deshé and Amal Dow presented a text study on the theme of the holy day of the week. This presentation was opened to the public.

The teachers visited the Geneva mosque and the Lausanne synagogue where they were hosted by rabbi Lionel Elkaim. The group and a few visitors celebrated together on Friday evening Shabbat. Sunday morning, all attended a celebration at the Saint Redempteur church where friar Jean-Robert Allaz welcomed them very warmly.

A colorful farewell evening ended this busy week. The participants are planning an assessment meeting at the start of the school year. It is with renewed energy that they will kick off the new pairing season, starting in October.

Their stay was covered by a beautiful article in the Echo Magazine, the Swiss romand Catholics news periodical (read on page press / www.coexistences.ch) and an interview in the radio program "A nearby neighbor" in Israel.

- **PROJECT BREAKING THE ICE, 15-29 AUGUST**

For the 4th year in a row, a team of 11 young adults, Jewish and Arab Israeli, among which 6 young women, were able to complete a trans-border hike in the Alps.

This summer, the mid altitude trek kicked off in the Saas Fee vicinity and ended in Zermatt, going through Italy (southern part of the Mont Rose). The group crossed twice a frontier embodied by mere stones, obviously a powerful symbol for these youth living in Israel. The solidarity crossing some difficult stretch, the sharing of activities required by camping outdoor and the common aw at magnificent and unusual sceneries all contributed to building friendship ties between the participants, allowing them in the evenings after the walks to run fruitful dialog sessions organized by the facilitators Olfat Haider, Palestinian and Erez Meltzer, Israeli.

These young women and men have all committed once back home to use the acquired experience in inter-communautary activities.

The project benefited from many supports. The Swiss mountaineer Jean Troillet guided the group throughout the expedition. A highlight of the trek was on the last day when crossing the glacier of the Théodule, required the use of ropes lend graciously by the Diablerets section of the Swiss Alpine Club.

During the two days preceding and the three days following the trek, participants and facilitators were hosted in La Fouly, in the Kohler family chalet, members of Coexistences. Upon returning to Zermatt, the group was hosted by the Municipality of Orsières. The project required many transport by road, all provided for by the Service de la sécurité civile et militaire, under the leadership of Didier Mermoud.

FUNDRAISING DINER

On September 22d took place the traditional fundraising evening which brings together members, sponsors, friends, those who do not know yet Coexistences and friends of friends, in short all those who through their attendance support our action.

We were this year 65 persons at the Refuge des 4 Vents in Pully. The very warm evening started by a much applauded speech by Massimo Sandri, our president.

Later on, young amateur musicians delighted us with at times joyful at times nostalgic pieces : Ilan and Alois played klezmer music on the saxophone, while Karim and Félix played arabo-andalous melodies on the oud and darbouka.

As for the meal, it was composed of Eastern Europe and Oriental dishes. We are very pleased to have collected nearly 3'500 Fr which will be used in next years' projects. A warm and big Thank You to all who have participated, attended and the many who have donated.

Danièle, Dominique, Juliette, Tatiana

STATUTORY ASSEMBLY

Tuesday 8 October, our general assembly took place at the CPO in Lausanne and you were many to attend. The chairman Massimo Sandri announced its resignation and offered us a last speech followed with much attention, reminding us of what made and makes our convictions and our strength. He wished Coexistences much happiness for the coming years, and a more peaceful environment for our friends "over there".

He will remain on the board but leaves its seat to Fiuna Seylan-Ongen, who was elected our new chairwoman.

CONFERENCE BY MRS. ADI CHEN ON MIXED MARRIAGES IN ISRAEL 8 OCTOBER 2013

In a second part of our General Assembly, we welcomed for a very interesting presentation Mrs. Adi Chen, researcher and lawyer in Israel.

Adi Chen collaborates with the Swiss Comparative Law Institute at Lausanne University. Funded with the help of Coexistences, she has chosen to concentrate on the inter religious marriages in Israel between Jews and non-Jewish when each keep its own faith.

Israel does not have the monopoly of women and men who, to wed the person they love, defy the barriers of nationality, culture or religion. The declarations and other international conventions are there to establish this right. The article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 expressly stipulates it : “From the wedable age, man and woman, without any restriction from race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and form a family. They have equal rights regarding marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.”

The right to marry is therefore not only a universal right, but also, at least in democratic countries, a constitutional right. Yet, the state of Israel has no Constitution. There are what has come to be called fundamental laws notably that regarding the “respect of Man and of its freedom”, but none tackles the fundamental freedom to marry, in a civil and laic way.

THE TORAH IS LAW

It is the Jewish legislation, the Hala'ha, which applies in the matter of marriages and divorces. The main argument the religious parties have opposed to the establishment of a civil marriage, has been that the inter religious marriage creates a distance for the Jewish partner with the community, and his children from Judaism. It therefore represents a danger of assimilation, and in the long run, of the disappearance of the Jewish nation. And as a consequence of the State of Israel itself as a Jewish state.

As such, if a Jewish woman is to marry a Muslim man, she will keep being considered a single person. As for the children, as in Judaism the children are considered receiving their religion from the mother, they will be considered as Jews. However if a Jewish man marries a Muslim woman, the man will also be considered as a single person, but his children will not be accepted as Jews.

This practice doesn't date back to the foundation of the State of Israel in 1948. It is a heritage from the Ottoman Empire and then from the British Mandate: the Muslim marries and divorce at a Muslim court, the Christians according to the Christians laws, and the Jews according to the laws of the Torah. The only possibility left to marry for mixed couples is therefore with the conversion of one of the partners.

To circumvent this, lawyers invent stratagems. Couples go to marry in Cyprus, in Italy, in Tchekia, in Paraguay. But these “tricks” have their own shortfalls. The couple, back in Israel, is indeed registered as married at the inhabitant's registry of the Interior Ministry, but this registration is only declarative and administrative. Issues will be faced once this couple wants to divorce. The tribunal will not be able to pronounce them as divorced as there is no recognised marriage. The State will consider this as a dispute between two single persons.

ON THE ROAD TO CIVIL MARIAGE?

To this day, the High Court of Justice is thinking about recognizing civil marriages established abroad when at least one of the partners is a Jew and Israeli citizen. Furthermore, its conception is that from the first and foremost right of man to respect must derive secondary rights, among which that to marry and create a family. The High Court of Justice has therefore established for the recognition of this right as a constitutional right. For now, no juridical decision has been taken that would establish a jurisprudence, but the door is not completely closed.

Last, some solutions are being suggested for those who do not wish to marry religiously, by the creation of a “register of couples”. It would have an official value and would therefore give a public recognition with the same rights and obligations as in the religious marriage. But according to Adi Chen, this solution is only a compromise from a “citizen and liberal” point of view if not giving up to the religious power, and nothing less than opening a civil and laic way should be undertaken.

Of Jewish mother and Muslim father, both Israelis, Adi Chen knows what she is talking about. The road is bumpy and the door narrow, but she is not losing faith in the future.

Summary by Jacqueline Allouch, based on the text of the conference translated from Hebrew by Daniela Hersch.