

DEAR FRIENDS OF COEXISTENCES, ON THE MENU OF LAST NEWSLETTER OF THE YEAR, EXCITING PROJECTS AND THE NEW YEAR'S BALL

PROJECTS 2014

Coexistences is organising a new series of projects for next year in line with those realised with success over the past years. With the same objective of dialogue and meeting the other, the Association will bring to Switzerland different groups of Israeli and Palestinian youngsters and adults, marked by the conflict, to give them the opportunity to live a unique experience together.

- **ZAHAVA NEUBERGER PROJECT**

Zahava Neuberger is an orthodox Jewish mediator who, since 2003, has monitored dialogue groups between Muslim, Bedouin, Christian and orthodox Jewish women. She is convinced that women can be influential in the dialogue because they feel freer than men. The aim of the project is to invite to Switzerland one of these groups which has been meeting together over a number of years. The one-week trip is scheduled for March 2014 and the group will comprise twenty five women and a facilitator.

Expected benefit: to consolidate the friendship and the human experience of meeting the other, discover other ways of coexisting in an environment away from the conflict, develop inter-community projects for meetings and exchange.

To know more : <http://www.jcjr.org/galilee-jewish-and-arab-christian-women>

- **BREAKING THE ICE PROJECT**

On the model which has worked so well since 2011, medium-mountain hikes will be proposed to Jewish and Arab students from Haifa University, accompanied by professional mediators, including Olfat Haider. Olfat is in charge of programmes in Beit HaGefen and has a long experience as a facilitator. She has been present in the project since 2010. This is once again planned in partnership with Haifa University which has integrated it into its action programme aiming at improving inter-community relations on the campus. The group will come for fourteen days in August and will comprise twelve students and two facilitators.

Expected benefit: motivate the participants to engage in concrete actions, supervised by the University, to enhance inter-community relations on the campus.

- **ADOLESCENTS IN DIALOGUE PROJECT (STILL UNDER DISCUSSION)**

Coming back to the origins of the association, we hope to welcome a new mixed group of Jewish Israeli and Palestinian adolescents from Jerusalem. The group will be led by two professional facilitators we have already worked with and whose excellent reputation is well known. This project will be carried out in partnership with the Adam Institute for Democracy and Peace, reputed for its seriousness and long-standing involvement in the education of democracy and against racism.

The project will allow the young participants to live a shared experience in continuity with the work on dialogue started in Israël. They will be hosted by families in Lausanne for about twelve days in August 2014. The sixteen youngsters will be accompanied by two facilitators and two professors.

Expected benefit: consolidate the dialogue and human experience in meeting the other, discover other ways of coexisting in an environment away from the conflict.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Several members of our association are regularly called upon or volunteer their services to talk about the action of Coexistences. This autumn, there were two events:

SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL CLUB / LAUSANNE / 6 NOVEMBER

Soroptimist is the largest world organisation of women involved in business and professional life. It claims to be a universal voice for women who are interested in implementing their motto: understand, defend, undertake. The Lausanne Club was founded in 1949.

On 6 November last, at the instigation of Danielle Kohler, Halina Sandri Rabczynska aroused interest and a lot of emotion with the film of the ascent of the Mont Blanc and the projection of slides resuming our philosophy and past and future projects.

About fifteen women in their thirties who comprise the Lausanne section discovered our action. They expressed their desire to meet Zahava Neuberger's group of women and also women from here who are also involved in the inter-religious dialogue.

ROTARY CLUB GERMANY / FRANKFORT / 16 NOVEMBER

Representatives from all the Rotary clubs in Germany meet once a year. On this occasion, Coexistences, in line with one of the five Millennium goals of the United Nations adopted by the Rotary (work toward Peace), was invited by Giovanni Baruzzi of the Sindelfingen Rotary Club to present our action. Halina Sandri Rabczynska and Fiuna Seylan Ongen were warmly piloted by Tyll Carstelan, national Director of Rotary Inter-Country Relations.

The Rotary International has around two million members and in this respect is considered to be one of the world's largest clubs. Thus, the Rotary Club Germany, in conjunction with the German Red Cross, managed to collect €500,000 from their 50,000 members for the construction in Kenya of a hospital for Somali refugees. Rotary Germany comprises approximately 1000 clubs which are each composed of thirty to a hundred members.

The presentation of Coexistences was the first item on the agenda in the morning and was followed with great interest by the Rotarian participants (approximately forty, originating for 80% from the business world and liberal professions). The YMCA 2006 film, which closed the presentation, was applauded with great enthusiasm. Halina and Fiuna were approached by several people who congratulated them for the initiative, the excellence of the work and their commitment.

A follow-up meeting is scheduled for mid-December to discuss fundraising for the projects of Coexistences.

CIVIL MARRIAGE IN ISRAEL

A few weeks ago, a bill for legalizing civil marriages in Israel was proposed by Yesh Atid, the second largest party in the Israeli government, which holds 19 out of 120 seats in the Knesset. The bill is an exceptional initiative in the country where only the different religious communities are authorised to perform religious marriage ceremonies.

Ms Adi Chen, Israeli lawyer and researcher, was able to benefit from the support pledged by Coexistence, to facilitate her research on mixed marriages and their legal and social impacts on Jews and Muslims in Israel. The members of our association who attended the General Assembly on October 8, learned from her expertise in this matter. Adi Chen responded to the latest developments in Israel. Read more at the end of the newsletter.

**NEW YEAR'S GRAND BALL
FRIDAY 10 JANUARY 2014 / CASINO DE MONTBENON**

This ball in favour of Coexistences is at its seventh edition and has become a must for the winter start-back. You can contribute to its success in two ways: by coming along and inviting your friends, or by helping the team of volunteers who make the evening possible (contact: carole.guinard@atelierk.org). Catering and refreshments (always delicious) from 8 p.m. and music (always fantastic) until 2 a.m.

YOU SAID ORCHESTRE JAUNE?

The Orchestre Jaune, twenty-two people reunited by Daniel Perrin, pianist-composer from Lausanne, who play dance music, in English, French, Italian, Spanish, Serb, Arabic, timeless hits, hours of a dance repertoire. Despite twenty years of existence, the Jaune has retained its freshness, a beautiful amber yellow like a mature whisky. On stage and on the floor, we get together, see people we haven't seen for ages, notice how the tribe has grown. Young musicians are taken on board, couples form, drift apart, and then drift together again, generations and styles mix. At the end of the ball, the musicians put away their instruments, the dancers have a last drink, the musicians likewise. Everyone's happy and shattered. We danced like mad, played like heroes, see you next time and we'll discover what the tribe has become, on stage and on the floor. (Extract from *Ainsi va le bal de l'Orchestre Jaune*, Marie Perny, www.orchestrejaune.ch)

In the hope of see you there, we wish you a very happy festive season. Raas Assana is over, Hanukka too, now the days of Advent herald Christmas and the New Year. Should this be a joyous time for you!

The communication group: Carole, Edgar, Elsa, Fiuna, Jacqueline
English translation: Jenny Rice



ADI CHEN COMMENTS ON A POSSIBLE LAW ON CIVIL MARRIAGE IN ISRAEL

A few weeks ago, a bill for legalizing civil marriages in Israel was proposed by Yesh Atid, the second largest party in the Israeli government, which holds 19 out of 120 seats in the Knesset. The bill is an exceptional initiative in the country where only the different religious communities are authorised to perform religious marriage ceremonies. Adi Chen responded to the latest developments in Israel.

WHAT IS YOUR PERSONAL REACTION TO THE BILL UNDER DISCUSSION IN THE KNESSET TO LEGALIZE CIVIL MARRIAGE IN ISRAEL?

I personally believe that it is impossible to avoid the establishment of a procedure for civil marriage in the State of Israel. As a citizen of the State of Israel, I think that the Israeli legislator can and even must bring the state into a new era and adapt its laws of personal status to those of the western world.

As I mentioned in my speech, the right to marry is recognized by most countries in the modern world as a **fundamental right**. But this right is not fully protected in Israel. The country continues to a certain extent to preserve the Ottoman law and the Mandatory law that were in place prior to the establishment of the state in 1948.

Under this system, marriage and divorce are entered into only under religious law. The State of Israel honors and respects every religious belief. Thus, citizens can be married according to religious law, irrespective of their religious affiliation. The difficulty arises when there are religious limitations on a marriage or when the couple does not want to marry according to religious law.

Nevertheless the option exists for those couples to marry outside of Israel. Despite the fact that such marriages are not legally recognized in Israel, the state grants those couples many rights based upon other laws. Sometimes those rights are even more favorable than the rights of individuals married in religious ceremonies.

In addition, the state should alleviate the “burden” of traveling abroad in order to marry. It is important to emphasize that in recent years the State has begun recognizing certain civil marriages that took place abroad between Jewish spouses that have no religious limitation on their marriage (for example – a Cohen who is forbidden to marry a divorcee).

THE STATE OF ISRAEL SEEMS TO BE RATHER PRAGMATIC HERE. WHY INSIST ON CHANGE?

As I have already stated, the right to raise a family is a constitutional right, and the State of Israel has the obligation to provide a legal response to its citizens who want to enter civil marriages rather than religious marriages. The one and only way is to establish legal norms that will allow every person to implement his fundamental constitutional right to raise a family. There is no other way and there is no shortcut. The basis for that right is found in the Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty. The legislator must intervene and he cannot leave the task to the court.

I would like to add that in Israel a marriage is recognized only if it is valid according to religious law. In my opinion, this is a problematic situation that reflects and preserves the control of the religious system. It does not fully address the fundamental rights of an individual to freedom of choice, freedom of religion, freedom from religion, and equality.

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On the other hand, and to be balanced, I have to mention another perspective. As a Jewish State, a significant percentage of the population – and not only religious individuals – wishes to maintain a system of religious marriage. Their belief is that religious marriages preserve the future of the Jewish people and protect them from the dangers of assimilation. I once discussed the subject with one of my colleagues who argued that if civil marriage is provided for in Israel, then, within one or two generations, anyone wishing to marry a Jewish person will have to demand a genealogical study to ensure that the partner is a Jew.

YOU SUFFERED PERSONALLY FROM THE SITUATION. HOW HAVE PEOPLE LIKE YOU CONTRIBUTED TO THE FACT THAT IT IS BEGINNING TO CHANGE?

I encountered legal and social difficulties only because my parents were intermarried. Yet it was precisely these difficulties which also became my source of inspiration and growth. Without them, I don't think that I would have had any incentive to become active in this area. It is important to emphasize that despite the difficulty, there were those, including leaders in the field of Israeli law, who with humanitarian vision opened doors for me and positively influenced my life.

As a woman in academia and as a practicing Israeli lawyer, I saw it as a challenge. I felt that I carried an obligation to thoroughly investigate the subject of mixed marriages in Israel from a number of perspectives. I hope to suggest solutions that may one day assist similar families. The contributions to change are expressed in writing, investigation, and in participation in the relevant Knesset legislative committees. In this way, I see my personal contribution as well.

HOW WILL A LAW FOR CIVIL MARRIAGE HELP ESTABLISH A BETTER UNDERSTANDING AND DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE MAJORITY OF THE POPULATION AND THE MINORITIES IN ISRAEL?

Legislation in a democratic state reflects the vision of the state and the principles it stands for. Legislative establishment of civil marriages will undoubtedly show that civil marriage in Israel, including intermarriage, is acceptable in the eyes of the state and not harmful to the Jewish and democratic nature of the State of Israel.

Today the State of Israel grants many rights to intermarried couples and to couples who enter civil marriages, even though such marriages are not provided for or recognized by law. However, legislation that establishes civil marriage would further demonstrate that the Israeli legislator responds to the needs of all its citizens. Such legislation correctly implements the Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty by recognizing the right of an individual to raise a family, not according to religious law. This is a fundamental right that must be protected.

Following such legislation, and with many civil marriages in Israel, the perception of the public will undoubtedly change. In addition, the interaction between couples from different cultures and ethnic groups can reveal the beautiful qualities in people, enrich their lives, and prove that it is possible to live together with mutual respect, with love and especially in peace.

Interviewed by Edgar Bloch