

DEAR MEMBERS, FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS OF COEXISTENCES,

Despite the dramatic events, the Breaking-the-Ice students, Jewish and Arab girls and boys, came. They stood firm, giving as never before meaning to their choice of dialogue. Thanks to their determination and perseverance, the patiently woven threads remain unbroken, and, as planned, Coexistences had the joy of welcoming the group this summer. Here, fervently watching and listening to the news, anxious and confident all at once, we also kept up the dialogue with our Jewish and Arab friends there. You will find below the exchanges received during the conflict.

FEEDBACK ON BREAKING THE ICE / 26 AUGUST – 9 SEPTEMBER 2014

Once again this year, a new group of students from Haifa University came to exercise dialogue whilst walking through our Alps. This group of eleven participants aged between 23 to 30 comprised six Jews and five Arabs, with an even balance of men and women. They were met by a delegation of Coexistences on their arrival in Cointrin on 26 August and taken to La Fouly, where, as in the past, they spent two days' preparation in the chalet provided by Danielle and Pierre Kohler. On 28 August, they travelled by road and train to the departure point of the trek, near Argentière in the Chamonix valley (France).

The chosen itinerary led through the National nature reserve of the Bérard valley, towards the Swiss frontier, crossed over at the Emosson dam, reaching Salanfe lake where the group spent three nights (2 - 5 September). Climax: the ascension of the Haute Cime, the highest (3200m) and most accessible of the Dents du Midi situated close to the lake. As previously, the nights were spent in nature, the group transporting the tents, food and cooking material. The back-

packs weighed on an average 15 kg! Luckily, the weather was nearly always good. On 5 September, the trek ended at the Marécottes, from where the group were driven back to La Fouly. Return to Lausanne on 8 September, shopping in the afternoon and then a convivial communion with the numerous members of Coexistences during an animated and lively farewell evening at the Refuge du Censuy in Renens. The group spent their last night in the Kohler's house in Lausanne and took their home-bound plane on the morning of 9 September.

The mediators who prepared the group in Israel and accompanied the trek were - as before - Olfat Haider, Palestinian, and - a particularity this year - Asaf Ron, Israeli, Director of Beit Hagefen, partner institution of the project at the same time as Haifa University. The direction on the ground was ensured by Denis Ducroz, mountain guide who lives in Chamonix. Denis has a wide experience in the « dialogue-treks » organised by Olfat, including those which took place over the past years under the aegis of Coexistences.



Reem and Ori, Noam, Irit and Raef, Danielle and Fares



Marwa and Rami, Mayan and Salim

Jean Troillet, who was a Breaking The Ice guide in 2013, came this time for a day to back up the team for their ascension of the Haute Cime.

As soon as they arrived, the group appeared united, very warm, evidently well prepared for the task awaiting them. We would mention that five of the six Jewish participants, two of whom were orthodox, held very right-wing political opinions. The days were shared between walking and, once the camp had been set up, « dialogue activities ». These latter did not aim at unifying or even bringing closer the positions on political questions, but rather at developing among the participants, on the one hand their faculties to listen and empathise, on the other their capacity to express their opinions and feelings concerning the conflict as well as their cultural differences in a way that was acceptable for the other. The tools used were very varied : round-table discussions where each one in turn brings and directs the debates on a subject linked to life in Israel and close to her/his heart, life stories relating in detail one's biographical path, role plays. For example, on the fifth day of the trek, one of the Jewish girls, with very right-wing views, offered to play the role of a small Palestinian girl terrorised by the bombings. Also, during the trek, conversations one to one on the conflict were numerous, generally very assertive but respectful, without in the least trying to impose one's point of view. In this respect, a Jewish girl asked her Muslim comrade why the Palestinians don't go to live in Egypt, since, after all, the inhabitants of this country are Arabs like them. The answer was given without a trace of anger, explaining that the word « Arab » cannot in itself represent an identity and that the Palestinians feel themselves as much strangers in Egypt as the Jews.

On the third day of the trek, one of the girls (Irit) had to stop because she had a problem with her knee, luckily it wasn't serious. This mishap allowed us to measure the extent of solidarity which prevailed in our association. By calling uniquely on the help of our members, Irit was driven to Lausanne and put up there until the end of the walk, taken to the CHUV (hospital) to be examined, and then brought back to join the group when they finished their walk to the Marécottes.

As in the past, the trip also benefitted from several backups outside of Coexistences, which we would like to pay tribute to here. Thanks to the support of the authorities, the bulk of the road transport was ensured by the Civil Protection of the Canton of Vaud. The day after their arrival, the group was welcomed in La Fouly by a delegation of the communal authorities, who, on this occasion, offered an aperitif in a warm and convivial atmosphere. The Auberge de Salanfe provided us with major logistic support for the three days' camping on this site. And, since unauthorised camping is in principle banned in Switzerland, the communes involved (Evionnaz, Finhaut, Salvan) graciously delivered the required authorisations. Finally, thank you as well to Ahmad Abu Nijmeh, Head of the Valentin Catholic School, who, year after year, opens the doors of his establishment to store the abundant camping material required for the trek.

In conclusion, as in the past, Breaking The Ice 2014 was a complete success. It took on a particular coloration in view of the recent exacerbation of the israelo-palestinian conflict. That in such conditions the group was able to come and function as well as it did demonstrates the very high quality of the preparatory work carried out upstream by Beit Hagefen and Haifa University. The positive dynamics thus engaged will be prolonged since the participants have decided to organise this autumn a meeting with their respective families.

This year, probably due to the events in Gaza, the press was interested in the project and two articles appeared, one in the Hebdo, the other in the Evénement syndical. They are accessible on our site www.coexistences.ch.

EXCHANGES DURING THE GAZA CONFLICT

Extracts of remarks received from Jewish, Arab and Palestinian participants following the message of support from Coexistences

Taking the measure of the devastating consequences engendered by the Gaza-Israel conflict, especially by the civilian populations, The Committee of Coexistences wished to testify, by email on 10 July, our unconditional support to all the participants who have come to Switzerland since 2008. We also appealed to all the members of the association who met them or hosted them to try to enter into contact with them personally:

Dear Friends,

You all came at least once to Switzerland under the auspices of Coexistences. We follow with deep concern the developing situation in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza, and wish to express our heartfelt sympathy. We remain convinced that dialogue is essential and we shall pursue our efforts to support it. We would be very happy to hear from each one of you.

With love and care,

In the name of Coexistences,
The Board

Following this message of sympathy, many replies were received and the Committee considers it natural to publish the main extracts. By respect of the people involved, we didn't plan on communicating these messages; they are published without revealing the identity of the authors and as they stand in order to preserve the spontaneity of the moment.

«Thank you very much Fiuna for your words; we also believe in dialogue and remain ready to invite people to talk to each other. Your support encourages us to continue along this path started years ago», confirms a participant. «Thank you for your sympathy and thoughtfulness; we all pray for a better world», says another. And another participant adds: «The things we are experiencing are difficult... Now we realise the importance of our work in developing dialogue among the groups of students. I was in the throes of preparing a wedding when suddenly the things which absorbed me seemed so trivial in face of the fear of children and their parents in the towns close to Gaza and the extent of the destructions and people killed in Gaza. It is shocking to see the surge of such hate and anger. Although I am far from these places, my heart is with the families and children who are enduring this situation. I hope that we will be able to live in a different, more pacific, more respectful and happier world, where it will be possible to respect each other without

thinking of anything else. These events makes me even more conscious of our role of educators. We must radiate humanity and be exemplary in the dialogue with our students, and, more fundamentally, for them to bring that into their homes and families.»

«Once again, we are having to go through the horror of bombs, missiles and death. All we can do is pray and hope our regular work with teachers and children will help them to remember that behind each bomb is a person, and behind each house ordinary families who are doing all they can in order to live a normal life», expresses another intervenor in this correspondance.

«As you say, the dialogue is essential and the war will lead us to negative results and still more innocent victims, while I believe that the majority of nations are against it. We really hope that it will quickly be behind us and that the possibility to live in peace and love will grow», declares another participant.

«I appreciate your support so much and, naturally, it seems important to keep up the dialogue, much more profitable to good things than bad. Let it all come to an end quickly!», confirms the community of Neve shalom-Wahat al Salam.

«Fear prevails and you don't know who you can confidence in. It's a difficult feeling, even if, here in the north, there are no bombs. We hope to continue. I try to remain optimistic and thank you once again for being with us, Muslims, Jews and Christians», explains an inhabitant of the triangle (population with an Arab majority in Israel).

Another message: «Thank you so much for your concern and support for us. Pray for the reign of a better world». Finally, this remark of a person in charge of the Teaching and Dialogue programme: «For eight years, we have unfortunately experienced a number of analogous situations. And the response of the Dialogue schools has always been: to commit ourselves to dialogue, today more than ever!».

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Once again this year, the general assembly will bring us together to review the projects realised in 2014 and envisage those for 2015.

**Save the date : Tuesday 18 November 2014 at 7.30 pm
(doors open at 7 pm)**

**Espace Dickens, Dickens 4, 1006 Lausanne,
www.espace-dickens.ch**

In the meantime, the communication group and all the work groups of the association wish you a glorious autumn.

WWW.COEXISTENCES.CH
INFO@COEXISTENCES.CH

BANK
BCV
PL ST-FRANÇOIS 14
CP 300, 1002 LAUSANNE
CCP 10-725-4
CLEARING 767
BIC/SWIFT BCVLCH2LXXX
IBAN CH29 00767 000C 5207 3545
