

DEAR MEMBERS AND FRIENDS OF COEXISTENCES,

Both here and there, by standing united and always in dialogue despite the adversity, we can confront these uncertain and troubling times. The encouragements we receive year after year are so many pleas for us to pursue our action. We owe those young Jews and Arabs who, in order to give peace a chance, sometimes brave their very families. Those of Her Voice and Breaking the Ice are prepared to come here. Let us be ready to welcome them.

A LAST LOOK AT THE “PETIT NOUVEL AN” BALL

Our thoughts and hearts were heavy on that Friday 9 January 2015 after the terrorist attacks against Charlie Hebdo and Hyper cacher in Paris, but, of a common accord, everybody came to put into practice the living together and “coexisting” we have been advocating by our action for nearly ten years.

A short night can be a delight! For its eighth edition, the Grand Ball of the “Petit Nouvel An”, on 9 January last, beat all its records. The “Orchestre Jaune” (Yellow Orchestra) played into the small hours of the morning with fantastic energy and ostensible joy. And the joy of all those who participated in this memorable event was manifest. The dance floor was always full right up until the last tune and the pub-

lic was awestruck by the musicians.

The volunteers were unflagging: those who tidied up, trays full of glasses, those selling the last cakes, those on the door, those at the bar, serving unflinchingly a last glass. People danced in the cloakroom, behind the counter, in the corridor and even on the dance floor!

Among the public were supporters who met up with their friends and many newcomers who, seduced by the magic of this ball, swore they would come again.

With the benefits of this event we can finance an entire trip thanks to you. So come again next year, invite your friends, the date is already fixed: 8 January 2016, in the “salle des fêtes” (functions hall) at the Casino of Montbenon, in Lausanne.

Make music and dance to cock a snook in the face of hate and violence...

SUMMER 2015 PROJETS

HER VOICE – 16 TO 25 AUGUST

In collaboration with Beit Hagefen and Sylvie Berkowitsch-Gassenbauer, this project involves a group of girls aged 16-17 recruited and selected from schools in Haifa. They will include in equal numbers Israeli Jews and Israeli Arabs who will take part in dialogue for more than five months in Israel before coming to Switzerland, a dialogue supervised by experts in facilitation.

BREAKING THE ICE – 27 August to 10 September 2015

Following the plan carried out over the last five years, a mountain hike will be proposed to Jewish and Arab students from Haifa University, accompanied by professional mediators.

The organisation for this has already begun, but if you are interested in participating, please contact us at info@coexistences.ch. You are more than welcome whenever you want.



COMBATANTS FOR PEACE

The project has finally been cancelled. The request for a financial participation from the CfP for the Israel-Switzerland-Israel flight tickets and the absence of public testimonial events other than meetings with the members of Coexistences are the main reasons. Also, in the context of an ongoing conflict, the binational character of this group explains the complexity of the decision process within Combatants for Peace.

COEXISTENCES IS TEN YEARS OLD!

The work of reflection and organisation is moving fast. Initially, if all goes well, a delegation from Coexistences will go to Israel this autumn to meet the leaders of the groups we have received. The idea is to elaborate with them the big get-together in 2016 of the members of Coexistences and all those who at one time or another came to Switzerland to continue their dialogue activity. Thus we would like to approach the following questions:

What has become of the people we received? What is their life like now? Who is married? Who has children? Have there been any mixed marriages? Have the Arab and Jewish families of the participants fraternised/made ties/or continued their exchanges?

What effect did the trip to Switzerland have on them? What has been the impact of our action on them, during their stay but also over the long term?

And, in general, has their vision of “the enemy” evolved once they were back at home?

NEWS FROM THERE

YOU SAID WOMEN IN MOVEMENT?

Danielle and Edgar Bloch’s visit to Shefar’am, an Arab village.

Arrival in Switzerland from 24 to 31 March 2014, the group «Women in Movement», more commonly known by the first name of its leader «Zahava», have pursued their meetings. In spite of the tensions, wars and other turbulences last summer, the twenty three Jewish, Muslim, Christian and Druze women continue their dialogue. A challenge which is far from evident in an increasingly hostile filled environment. These women meet in turn in the house of one or the other once a month. There are no specific themes, but the motivation to come together between women and mothers, often grandmothers, takes precedence over all other considerations. They discuss extensively their religious culture and are avid to learn about that of the others.

Last December, during a trip in the region, Danielle, responsible in Switzerland for the project for the «Women in Movement’s» visit and Edgar, were invited by Zahava to share a group evening at Shefar’am, a large Arab village ten or so kilometres distant from Haifa, the large town in the north of Israel. It was Houda, a Protestant and the wife of a Roman catholic, who hosted this small circle gathered around a potluck meal. The mixed theme of the evening focused on Christmas, which celebrates the birth of Christ, and Chanukah, the festival of lights, celebrated by the Jews at the same time. Zahava explained the meaning of Chanukah. Soon after, the candles were lit, accompanied by traditional songs for the festival of lights. Then, the participants sang Christmas carols in Arabic. Between the lights of the candles and the garland-bedecked Christmas tree, the participants talked and exchanged through the evening in a warm and peaceful atmosphere.

WHEN DIALOGUE AND A VISIT TO SWITZERLAND SOW SEEDS...

Long term, what impact does the stay in Switzerland and the dialogue procedure have on the participants? That is the question we legitimately all ask ourselves regularly. Here are some encouraging testimonies in way of an answer:

From the end of January to the end of February, 2015, François Feihl stayed five weeks in Israel, among which four spent on the campus of the University of Haifa, to follow an intensive course of Hebrew. Let us remind you that the participants of Breaking the Ice project are recruited among the students of this institution, which is thus an essential partner of Coexistences. François writes:

“This is the second intensive course I’m following at Haifa University and of course my choice for this is motivated by my participation in Breaking the Ice. I live on campus, in the dormitories for students, and it is a golden opportunity to meet former participants with whom I walked in the mountains. On arriving, before I even got to the dormitories, I met Ravit (2013), then Bassem (2012), who both welcomed me. The evening of my arrival, I eat with Tamer (2013), Miran (2013), Rami (2014) and Olfat. Opposite my room, there’s “the club”, a large room equipped with a small bar where the students come of an evening for a drink. I meet a lot of people there, not only former participants who keep telling me how their stay in our Alps marked them, but many others who I don’t know and who want to sign up for the next edition, and who question me. I realise that the project is well renowned and arouses great interest.

Designed for foreign students who do a year or a semester in Haifa, the Hebrew course counts approximately fifty participants from all horizons. At the introduction session, the Dean Hanan Alexander (who is Coexistences' contact person) takes advantage of my presence to explain Breaking the Ice, thus giving the project and our association good publicity.

I spend the week-end at Golan's (2010); he has become a close friend. He has remained very involved in Breaking the Ice. For the second week-end of my stay, he organises a hike in the region inviting all those who were involved in the project since the beginning. Twenty or so took up the invitation and we met for a half-day walk along Nahal Tsipori, in the lush Galilee countryside at this time of the year. There are representatives from every year (except 2011), some with their partners, and even their children. Olfat is there, as is Izhar, the Israeli facilitator in 2012. During a stop, everybody sits round in a circle and one after another explains what Breaking the Ice brought to them. A common theme: a new capacity to understand "the other side". Their partners express the same opinion and I realise that our action affects more people than just our participants.

I would like to mention a meeting with Hamoudi, who invited me for lunch and prepared a "choukchouka" in my honour. Hamoudi participated in Breaking the Ice in 2013. He grew up in the north, in Tuba, a very poor, isolated Bedouin village, where there is a lot of unemployment and criminality.

Next autumn Hamoudi will complete his studies in social science. Then he will devote himself to field work intended to open up villages like Tuba, in the aim of improving the economic and cultural conditions. In his future work, Hamoudi thinks he can benefit from the methods and approaches he learnt by participating in Breaking the Ice. For us in Coexistences, this is a beautiful example of the long term downstream benefits of our action.

In conclusion, my stay gave me the opportunity to renew contacts with our partners in Haifa, University and Beit Hagefen. Breaking the Ice will take place again in 2015. Asaf, the Head of Beit Hagefen, accompanied Olfat as Israeli facilitator last August and September. He appreciated this experience so much and found it so important, that he has decided to renew it and to come back in person next summer. Asaf also said how proud he was that the possibility of "Her Voice", the new project of a group of Jewish and Arab adolescent girls and Women in Movement, has been put in place between Beit Hagefen and Coexistences.



WHAT ELSE?

Come listen to the story of a young Palestinian girl from Jerusalem who came to Switzerland twice through the YMCA dialogue programme, the first year as a participant, the second as a peer leader, in 2008 and 2009. She has since successfully completed a Bachelor in International Relations at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

During her studies, she chose to analyse the Oslo Peace Process through a dialectical approach, by reporting and analysing the Israeli narrative and the Palestinian narrative.

In the aim of outlining both of these perspectives, the choice of this double analysis struck her as evident. It allowed her to bring to her audience the Palestinian point of view, while not forgetting the Israeli point of view. This approach which is firmly rooted within her obviously makes things more complicated because it forces moderation and consideration of the other side's point of view. But at the same time it demands a thought process which refuses facility and simplification by acting as a check to any partisan bias. Another seed...



TAKE UP YOUR AGENDA

SUPPORT EVENING AND DINNER

Come in droves on Sunday 14 June 2015 to the refuge of the 4 Vents in Pully.

You will receive further information in good time but in the meantime you can already reserve this evening in favour of Coexistences and as of now tell your friends. We are concocting an exceptional evening.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The General Assembly will take place on Tuesday 17 November 2015.

We look forward to seeing you on these occasions and wish you, dear members and friends, a luminous and revigorating spring.

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