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COEXISTENCES / DECEMBER 2015



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Dear members, friends and sympathisers of
Coexistences,

Given the news which arrives day after day, here and there, we stand beside those who, the first concerned, refuse to lose heart. The determination and strength of the participants in our dialogue groups encourage us to pursue our commitment and the year 2016 looks promising.

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GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2015

Under the chairmanship of Fiuna Seylan-Ongen, our statutory General Assembly was held on Tuesday 17 November 2015 at the CPO in Lausanne, and many of you were present. The Committee announced the demission of Massimo Sandri, founding member, of François Feihl and of Dominique Benmuvhar and thanked them for their unwavering involvement and their exceptional work. Two new members were presented and accepted on the Committee: Halina Sandri, founding member, psychotherapist with the association Appartenances and Laurent Enser, among others President of the company ISCAR France and Managing Director of the company TUNGALOY France.

During the second part of the evening, we had the pleasure of welcoming Francis Piccand from the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (DFAE) and member of the Political Administration for the Middle East and North Africa Division in Bern. He has been working on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for 35 years.

Francis Piccand spoke in a personal capacity in order to stimulate our own reflection concerning the situation on the ground in a very turbulent regional and international context. In view of all the other conflicts, Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria... the Israeli-Palestinian one has lost its high-priority character; it is qualified as a "low-intensity conflict" and has been eclipsed in the latest debates in the UN. According to Mr. Piccand, a situational analysis would probably show that "the peace process is at a stalemate". Manifestly, the situation has seriously deteriorated and the efforts for peace have failed, giving way to chronic violence. Some do not hesitate to see the early-warning signs of a third Intifada. Since 1967, there has been no sign of a Palestinian State, a persistent and even increasing Israeli occupation and a catastrophic economic situation for 4.4 million Palestinians. For Palestinian youth, there is no horizon and the risk of radicalisation exists. The absence of talks, the frustration and the loss of confidence predominate on both sides.

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What are the possible scenarios? The Israeli government's settlement policy continues and is leading to a progressive "nibbling" of the Palestinian territories. The two-State solution is but virtual. Is it too late? Switzerland supported the Geneva Initiative via a financial contribution of one million francs per annum, but with no results to date on the ground.

Another solution could be the creation of a Palestinian State, according to international law and resolutions 242 and 338 of the UN Security Council (the Palestinian flag has been hoisted in Geneva), but questions still remain, such as the Palestinians' right of return and the dismantling of the Israeli settlements. As far as concerns a unilateral action by Israel for a withdrawal to the 1967 borders, this seems for the time being quasi impossible. Finally, Francis Piccard evoked the idea of a binational State, a solution which would involve a long and painful process towards the change of mentalities.

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Several projects have been outlined for 2016. They will be detailed during a special session scheduled for Tuesday 12 January 2016 which will take place at 19h30 at the Espace Dickens, av. Dickens 4 in Lausanne.

HER VOICE AND BREAKING THE ICE

Despite the tensions and numerous acts of violence in Israel and Palestine, the Her Voice and Breaking The Ice projects took place this summer 2015 to the satisfaction of all the participants. Much joy and a renewed vigour on both sides. Thus the two groups will come back in the summer 2016 to continue to build their patient and unremitting dialogue.

TALI/JCJCR (Jerusalem Centre for Jewish-Christian Relations)

After having received two groups of professors involved in the twinning programme “Dialogue and identity” between Christian Arab and Jewish schools, there is talk, in 2016, about friendship and confidence links involving the reception of a group of twelve to fifteen principals and vice-principals.

During a meeting last month, the principals themselves expressed their desire to travel to Switzerland in order to take time to get to know each other better and build links, and to discuss their specific problematics as school principals.

It would be profitable to receive a group of principals, on the one hand as an essential link for the implementation of a twinning programme in the schools and, on the other, because if teachers leave a school, they take away with them this experience, whereas the principals and vice-principals often remain for a long time in the same establishment and are therefore the guarantors of a long-term continuity, for both the letter and the spirit of the project. Finally, because through their initiative, they promote the choice of dialogue and consequently represent a living example for their Arab and Jewish pupils.

Since the first reception in 2013, the network has grown from a dozen to around twenty schools today, from the Galilee to Haifa in the North, and to Ramleh and Petah Tikva in the centre of the country. Just like the professors, this group would stay in the chalet and in families in Lausanne and this trip could take place during the second week of July.

As a reminder or for information: the main aim of the project of a seminar in Switzerland is to provide support for a dialogue programme led by the local institutions which ensure the promotion of insight and mutual respect between Jews and Arabs in Israel. The class twinning programme allows pupils of Jewish and Arab primary schools to increase their understanding of their own culture and religion and to introduce them to their partners in the twinned school. The knowledge and respect for the other are strengthened by these meetings which take place alternately in turn in the Jewish or Arab school.

See our website www.coexistences.ch - newsletters n°9 (September 2011) and n°15 (November 2013)

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COEXISTENCES IS TEN YEARS OLD

In Neve Shalom-Wahat al-Salam, on 6 and 7 November 2015, a delegation of six members of Coexistences met 24 facilitators of the groups we have received since 2006. For two days, after a moving reunion, we reflected together about a project allowing us to mark the 10 years of Coexistences. The elaboration of this project foresees a trip to Israel topped by a festive event in autumn 2016 or in the spring of 2017. Our hosts want to do the same for us by offering to receive us in families of whom we received one/some of the member/s in Switzerland.

Haifa, Galilee, Jerusalem, the West-Bank, at each step one of our correspondents would organise for the members of Coexistences, the stay in a family and a visit of the surroundings. At the end of this short trip, we would take part in a reunion of all the participants we have received over the years in a location accessible to all, Palestinians and Israelis. There, we would join the workshops, recapitulate on the work accomplished and its consequences, and, in the evening, share the pleasure of being together. The project is gradually taking shape. Our partners have chosen the persons in charge for each step. We will no doubt have to return to Israel next spring to clarify the details of the programme. We are also thinking of the best way to give media coverage to this meeting in Israel-Palestine and in Switzerland and to testify this unifying action. This first meeting in Neve Shalom-Wahat al-Salam was successful from all points of view. Some of the 24 facilitators who attended met each other for the first time or met up again after having lost touch. Coexistences seems to have had a binding effect because very quickly they suggested meeting again, even outside of the "10 years of Coexistences" project. If we were to keep just one souvenir of this meeting, realising that our invitation had provoked such a desire to cooperate is without a doubt the most moving.



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TAKE OUT YOUR AGENDAS AND DANCE-CARDS!

“PETIT NOUVEL AN” GRAND BALL FRIDAY 15 JANUARY 2016 AT THE CASINO DE MONTBENON

The rumour is already running round that we are coming together on Friday 15 January 2016 for the 9th edition of the “Grand Bal du Petit Nouvel An” (delated New Year Ball) in favour of Coexistences. And, as each year, the unrivalled Grand Ball will take its quarters in the Casino de Montbenon in Lausanne. The poster will no doubt set many tongues wagging, especially female tongues! “Bring your chick” saying how horrid the Orchestre Jaune is! They are up in arms, so what! After all, aren't we all birds of passage on this earth?

However, if you are dying to contribute to the beauty of this evening, bring along, in addition to your chick, your relatives and the relatives of your relatives and your friends and the friends of your friends and come and give a hand to the team of volunteers already at work. (carole.guinard@coexistences.ch). From 8 p.m., party snacks to be tasted in immoderation and permission until 2 a.m. with the Orchestre Jaune, responsible for giving the tempo.

In the hope that you will come in droves, we express our sincere wishes for a holiday full of fun and laughter, and should the coming year bring with it warm feelings and friendship for all. We would also like to say thank you for the faithful support you have brought us over the years, the best encouragement towards the pursuit of our commitment by the side of all those who have chosen dialogue to give a chance to coexistence.

Very warmly yours,

The communication group and all the work groups of Coexistences.

