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COEXISTENCES / SEPTEMBER 2016

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Dear members, friends and sympathisers of
Coexistences,

After having welcomed this summer three groups: the Tali-JCJCR school principals, the girls from Her Voice and the Breaking The Ice hikers, for visits which we will tell you about in the next newsletter, we think the time has come to outline the “Coexistences’ ten years” project.

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ORGANISATION OF THE TEN YEARS’ EVENT :

The original idea, and what we learnt during the preparation of this event which will culminate in a grand gathering on 28 and 29 October in Kfar Hanokdim.

In 2016, we mark the ten years of Coexistences’ action. Ten years support of the Israeli-Palestinian dialogue by welcoming to Switzerland 25 groups, some 390 participants and their facilitators, far from the conflict and the difficult current situation. A time set aside during which our guests continue their dialogue in an environment whose beauty and calm favour the fundamentals, whilst being in contact with another culture, the Swiss culture, they discover that they have more things in common and new possibilities to coexist.

Thus, on the occasion of this anniversary, an important milestone, we wanted to celebrate it with you, members of Coexistences and the host families, and with all the Israeli and Palestinian participants, their facilitators, their families and friends.

During this event, we would like to assess:

- How their opinion has changed since their participation in the dialogue process and their stay in Switzerland ;
- What they have done since then and what they do differently ;
- How we can continue our support in the dialogue efforts in the present internal context.

Based on this idea, a delegation of several members of Coexistences a first time to Israel to Neve Shalom-Wahat al Salam and a second time to the Palestinian Territories, in order to draw up with the facilitators a programme which could be of interest for everybody.

Apart from the drafting of the different aspects of this event, this preliminary work gave rise to multiple new encounters for our participants and the pursuit of an in-depth reflection on the nature of the change in perceptions and what is needed to consolidate that change in order to make it long-lasting.

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It also transformed us, giving us more understanding of the conflict and the stakes, faced as we were with very practical questions and, more specifically, the challenge of finding a place for the final get-together accessible to everybody, new encounters, our debates, the thematic of the visits proposed by the local organisers in the different regions, the areas of interest of the Swiss participants ...

But the first result of this work is to have succeeded in recapturing the imagination of the volunteers in this preparation group for the 10 years, and revitalising or consolidating our commitment towards Israeli-Palestinian dialogue with the aid of Coexistences.

NOVEMBER 2015, NEVE SHALOM-WAHAT AL-SALAM, ISRAEL

Discovery by the symposium participants of the diversity of the groups received by Coexistences

Twenty out of the thirty facilitators who were invited to the symposium participated. Only certain representatives from TALI were absent at this first meeting. For the first time these facilitators, who have in common the facilitation of Israeli-Palestinian dialogue, meet each other and discover the diversity of the groups received in Switzerland.

The idea of a return of hospitality (the Swiss participants to be put up in families in the same way as the hospitality received in Switzerland) came to the forefront and led to the present project for the end of October: the formation of four Swiss delegations each visiting four regions where the dialogue groups come from, culminating in a final grand get-together of the 390 participants, their families and friends who are interested in meeting the Swiss people who have made the trip.

The working sessions in Neve Shalom-Wahat al-Salam is an opportunity for everybody to get to know each other. But above all the meals and other breaks are conducive to meeting people with such different existences: Izhar Arad, from Breaking The Ice, a facilitator entirely engaged in action, gets into a deep conversation with Monir Shanaa, from Ramallah and member of Sulha. Tamer Atalla, a Druze participant and one of the mainstays of Breaking The Ice over the years, listens intently to Fullah Falfullah, from East-Jerusalem and clown in the Department of Pediatric Oncology in Hadassah Hospital. Asaf Ron (director of Beit HaGefen) is interested in the work of education to non-violence of Jamal Meqbil (Wounded Crossing Borders), Michal Levin wants to collaborate with Beit HaGefen.



Monir Shanaa, Lisa Waldbaum, Tamer Atalla



Massimo Sandri, Golan Shalvi

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We, Swiss, take the measure of how little is known about the living conditions in the Palestinian Territories, even among the dialogue facilitators, and how the physical wall of separation wall leads to a certain indifference (it's on the other side, out of sight), as if by omission.

For the YMCA facilitators (Linda Jakob, Haneen Magadly, Youssef Abdel Gafer, Shira Lapi- dot, Michal Levin, Douaa Kassem), these are very happy reunions. Most of them have left the YMCA and are now scattered all over Israel, are married, have built a family, whilst retaining a great affection and an almost familial link. The YMCA is a key period in their professional path and their lives. In the midst of knife attacks and fatal responses, racist and stigmatising declarations, discouragement is huge, for them all the years of work seem derisory, and the Arab women facilitators, especially those from Jerusalem, are in an extremely fragile psychological state, worried for their security and hiding their identity.

However, on the second day, faced with projecting themselves in this event, also the memory of the visits to Switzerland, of our energy and commitment, and this meeting outside the habitual circles, the group feels better and becomes more relaxed.

At lunchtime, several facilitators from the YMCA debate the change of perceptions and, more specifically, the actions needed to consolidate this change in the middle and long term. The discussion continues and they agree that meetings are necessary 12 to 18 months after the end of the dialogue programme in order to maintain the effect of this change over time. Undeniably, the level of conceptualisation is more developed among the facilitators of the YMCA. As for the others, this level of reflection opens up new perspectives.

Between the first symposium in November and the reunion de May, organised to realise the programmes for the four visits (23-28 October) and to progress in the details of the final event, the YMCA facilitators met once again at the home of Sylvie who works with Fullah on the Jerusalem programme.

But overall, not much progress was made despite reminders: remote communication doesn't work very well and it is urgent to decide on the final get-together.



Roots, West Bank



Ali Abu Awwad

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MAY 2016, ROOTS, WEST BANK

Reinforce the links between these facilitators whose horizons are so diverse

This time, we meet those responsible for the four visits: Asaf Ron (Beit HaGefen / Haifa), Zahava Neuberger (Women in Movement / Galilee), Sylvie Berkowitch Gas-senbauer and Fullah Fullah for Jerusalem, Jamal Meqbil, Ahmed Helou and Gadi Kenny for the West Bank. Eva Halimi (Tali) joins us.

In order to meet the organisers from the West Bank without incident, we accept the proposition to meet at ROOTS in the home of Ali Abu Awwad's. Ali is a non-violence militant who leads a dialogue initiative with the settlers. He is the founder of a Palestinian national non-violence initiative (Taghyeer), and was the spokesperson of the Bereaved Parents Forum, an NGO which facilitates the meeting between bereaved persons from both sides. ROOTS is in the West Bank, but surrounded by the Gush Etzion settlement.

This choice gives rise to discussions: for some, going to the Palestinian Territories is a source of fear (that day, false rumours are going round about stone throwing), for the others, the settlers being part of the problem, ROOTS' approach represents a compromise.

Nevertheless, on that cold and windy morning, they are all present. The welcome is warm around a simple but tasty breakfast and, everybody arriving from Israel, listen attentively to the presentation Ali Abu Awwad makes of his vision and work. For Zahava and Asaf, it is their first time in the West Bank and they listen to a Palestinian speak to them about his itinerary and his choice of non-violence. The attention is respectful and unpolemical.

This new encounter between the different facilitators proves beneficial, strengthening the first encounters in the month of November 2015. Asaf's interest is reinforced around the idea of a visit of young people at Jamal's in the Palestinian Territories.

The programmes of the visits are detailed and often resemble our own: too optimistic with regard to the concrete possibility of doing so much in such a short time ...

The decision regarding the location of the final get-together is urgent. Our greatest desire is to hold it in a place accessible to everybody, without a permit, as a principle of equity. Finding this location reveals the concrete obstacles to the dialogue with the Palestinians in the Territories. Very few places are accessible to everybody without a permit: two are surrounded by settlements, another is fenced in and flanked by a military base. Only one is open but, with all the goodwill of its organisers, our figures exceed its accommodation facilities. Besides which, the location is so basic that there is the risk that many Swiss and local participants will recant. The alternative solution from the majority of the bi-national groups to meet abroad is of course beyond the means, unorganisable and wouldn't have any symbolical value.

After many discussions and a number of visits, the decision is taken to organise the final get-together in a Bedouin village in Israel in the Negev desert. A decision backed up by the fact that a large proportion of the Palestinians from the Territories concerned by our invitation are already holders of a permit for Israel, and with the guarantee that SULHA will help us obtain the missing permits.

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We were very concerned by another question: the date of the final get-together. The observance of orthodox Jews during the weekly rest is not compatible with the professional constraints of the other participants. It is also judicious to hold this get-together on Thursday and Friday – signifying for some to take a day's leave, but also the risk of the early departure of the orthodox Jews on the Friday (their residences sometimes far from Kfar Hanokdim). Or else, it is preferable to choose Friday and Saturday, with the idea that once accepted, spending an exceptional Shabbat away from home, everyone would be more serene and the event could take place at its own rhythm? This question gave rise to many debates and change of dates...

Since this second visit, the preparation of the four trips progresses and we have much more to learn and experience, but the organisation of this event:

- generated encounters between people who didn't know each other before, having Coexistences as their only thing in common;
- brought about encounters of professionals beyond their circles ;
- has already revived the enthusiasm of our partners ;
- will doubtless give rise to new collaborations in Israel and with the Palestinian Territories.

Thus, this project from all points of view is a Coexistences project!

P.S. A parallel project is in progress: it concerns the viral film 'In Between'. Result of a competition to be launched in film schools in Israel and Palestine, this film will symbolise the dialogue in the conflict. Viral? Yes, because this film of two minutes will be distributed on the social networks and, we hope, will be appreciated and shared by a large number of spectators.

For more information and to support the project: <https://wemakeit.com/projects/in-between>

TAKE UP YOUR AGENDAS

NON-VIOLENT COMMUNICATION WORKSHOP

Friday 23 September and Saturday 24 September 2016

Friday afternoon 23 September and Saturday 24 September 2016

Workshop given by Godfrey Spencer who has an experience of more than 30 years in NVC coaching. For information, please contact Halina Sandri (halina.sandri@bluewin.ch)

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

You are invited to participate in our annual general assembly on

Thursday 10 November 2016 at 19h00

You will of course be receiving more information in due time. Until then, we wish you a fruitful autumn.

The communication group and the work groups of Coexistences, September 2016