

CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION AND PEACE-BUILDING CAUX SCHOLARS PROGRAM SWITZERLAND

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During the summer of 2002, I attended the Caux Scholars Program on conflict transformation and peace-building in Switzerland. Every year twenty university students from around the world are chosen to participate in this international academic program that takes place in the village of Caux, nested high up in the Alps overlooking Lake Geneva. The program uses a value-based approach to peace-building and focuses primarily on the relationship between individual transformation and societal change. Faculty included Barry Hart from Eastern Mennonite University in Virginia, Sam Doe Director of the West African Peace Network, Claudia Lieber and Cynthia Samson who team taught from the United States. Given my area of research is on national reconciliation processes this program was a perfect complement to courses offered through the Institute for Dispute Resolution Masters program.

The Caux Scholars Program is linked to a world assembly where about 1,500 people gather to reflect on how best they would like to contribute to making a better world as well as attend various international conferences pertaining to peace-building. The Caux Conference Centre is best known for its earlier beginning when it was originally bought by Frank Buchman and his colleagues as a centre to bring together French and Germans to work on reconciliation after WWII. Since these early days, many people from countries around the world come to work on their national reconciliation issues. In this way the Caux conference centre is a hub of activity housing the scholars program as well as a myriad of conferences on topics such as global peace networking, peace-building initiatives, the spiritual factor in secular society, the arts as a tool for reconciliation, and human security.

This year Caux Scholars students came from Bosnia, Kosovo, Gaza city (Palestine), Israel, Azerbaijan, Sweden, Syria, the United States, Nagaland (India), Okinawa (Japan), Kenya, Somalia, Russia, Jamaica, Mexico, and myself from Canada. This diversity provided for a dynamic learning environment where global conflicts were no longer something you read about but were impacting in very personal ways fellow classmates.

The first week of the program we studied the impact of global terrorism on local communities around the world. The students grouped into regional caucuses and presented local, national, and regional responses to terrorism since September 2001. The process of developing a combined paper was not easy for many groups. The American students covered the spectrum of political perspectives and spent hours hashing out their disagreements. The most powerful presentation came from the Middle Eastern caucus comprised of an Israeli from Jerusalem and a Palestinian from Gaza city. They were

able to work through many of their differences and presented a unified and powerful paper.

In fact, the tensions they presented between the erosion of civil liberties and human security became all the more real when later that week, in an attempt to kill a “terrorist” Israeli forces demolished a home killing fourteen people (including nine children) and critically injuring 320 in Gaza city. The attacks were on the same street as one of our classmates, putting her family in danger. In this way, the course content went from theory into the hearts of the students as we waited to hear about the safety of our colleague’s family.

During the second week, we covered topics such as trauma recovery, restorative justice, and early warning prevention. Additionally, Cornelio Sommaruga came as a special guest to present “the Responsibility to Protect”, an international document that lays out how the world community will intervene during mass atrocities or genocide. We ended the week by going to Geneva where we met with staff from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Director of the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (which brings together rebel leaders and government in civil war). We had the afternoon to ourselves and I decided to attend the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous People which brought together over one thousand indigenous people from around the world.

In our third week, we learned about how to apply appreciative inquiry as a research methodology for the study of peace-building. Given that we were studying in the midst of various peace conferences we were able to try these techniques out on various peace-builders attending the Caux Conference centre. This enabled us to interact with a wide variety of people and learn from their successes and difficulties working on peace initiatives in places like Papua New Guinea, South Africa, Rwanda, East Timor, and the United States. In this way, we not only learned a new methodology but also gained knowledge and inspiration from experienced peace-builders.

Our final week was the highlight for many. We participated fully in the last conference entitled “Agenda For Reconciliation”. Representatives from Sierra Leone, Angola, the Great Lakes region, South Africa, Uruguay, Brazil, Japan, Korea, Australia, Cambodia, the United States and Canada gathered to work on national and international reconciliation issues. As Caux scholars, we organized the opening and closing ceremony, gave workshops on justpeace-building, educating for peace, and women and peace-building.

In addition, we were all assigned delegations from the various countries to accompany throughout the week. This entailed showing them around, helping them with any concerns they may have, and attending some of their negotiation processes. I accompanied the Sierra Leonean group, who are working hard to rebuild their country after civil war and mass atrocity. The conference proved effective in that ex-rebel leader Johnny Paul Karona and Minister of Interior, Chief Sammy Linga Norman had an opportunity to work out past animosities. In fact, two years earlier they were enemies and

would have killed one another had they been in the same room. At Caux, Chief Sammy Linga Norman apologized to Johnny Paul Karona for having put him in jail in the past. The two men were able to reconcile and embrace.

Caux has a special quality of being able to foster humility and equality amongst participants. For example, everyone contributes to the running of Mountain House. During the day a Minister or Governor General may offer a keynote speech and in the evening you may find yourself washing dishes or clearing tables with that same person. In this way it is possible to make many connections with a wide variety of people from grassroots activists to government officials and CEO of various organizations.

Given my thesis and area of interest is in national reconciliation processes, I had the opportunity to meet with several people working in this area. For example, John Bond was one of the key founders for launching Australia's National Sorry Day (day of apology, healing and action for the wrongs done to Aboriginal people). I was able to talk to him at length with the challenges facing this movement as well as read several of the "Sorry books" that Australians had filled with personal apologies for colonialism.

I also met Keiko who is the founder of a Japanese-British ngo working on reconciliation between Japan and British prisoners of war. In fact, I met one British prisoner of war who went through a reconciliation process with his prison guard. Reconciliation was certainly more than a concept it was a deeply lived way of life and worldview.

Canadian keynote speakers included Lloyd Axworthy on human security and Kimon Valaskakis on international governance. Both speeches were well received and sparked impassioned discussions throughout Mountain House.

My experience at Caux has provided me with critical knowledge and experience to pursue not only my thesis but my goal to work on national reconciliation processes and transitional justice. I would like to thank both the Centre for Global Studies and the Dean of Graduate Studies for giving me this opportunity.

For more information see: <http://www.caux.ch/>