

30 July 2008



'Digging Deep to Make Peace' by Katherine Marshall, Visiting Professor, Georgetown University, USA, who was a panelist on the theme, **'How do socio-economic factors exacerbate human insecurity?'** This first appeared on her blog available at www.washingtonpost.com

Tolstoy wrote that every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way. The same could be said about the ethnic and religious conflicts that cause so much strife in the world – in Burundi, Sri Lanka, the Ivory Coast and the Middle East. Memories run deep, and anyone who attempts to mediate finds bitterness, conflicting narratives and wounded people. Efforts to find common threads that could lead to solutions can be slow, fitful, and full of pain.

Nonetheless, several remarkable organizations are dedicated to this work. Initiatives of Change is prominent among them; it recently hosted, for example, an active peace process for Burundi.

Happily, the effort to unearth root causes of the conflicts that contribute so heavily to insecurity in the world is getting more attention these days. It was behind a meeting I attended last week at IofC's Caux Palace in Switzerland, where a carefully orchestrated discussion explored 'the root causes of human insecurity.' The meeting, attended by a mix of politicians, academics and media, was exploratory, but it was a start.

Digging into root causes is hardly easy or popular; in the post 9/11 world, some people think the term itself compromises basic moral judgments of right and wrong. But the Caux meeting outlined issues in an honest way - for example the broader impact of the festering Israel-Palestine conflict and repercussions of U.S. policies on Iraq and Iran. People like Clare Short, prominent British politician, Norway's former foreign Minister, a king from Uganda, and teams from regions where conflict is a daily reality brought a sense of urgency to the debates, which ranged from sweeping comments about the world's imbalance of power to practical examples from Uganda, Sierra Leone, Australia and Ireland.

Human insecurity came across as an immediate and real challenge, not an abstract and academic concept. The meeting's main contribution was to offer the kinds of glimmers of insight and friendship that alone offer ways to address such knotty problems.

One issue is how to link religion to conflict resolution. When religion enters the picture, tensions seem greater. But without an effort to trace and untangle the religious threads in conflicts, their deeper causes often remain unresolved. Bringing together religious leaders in the Middle East, the Balkans, and across Africa, for example, is increasingly viewed as a valuable contribution that could lead to elusive solutions. But religion is rarely considered in classic 'Track One' diplomacy, and religious leaders and issues are generally parked outside the door.

Often religion is not an immediate source of tension but is part of the 'root causes' of a conflict, buried deep under the surface. Despite growing appreciation among activists and intellectuals alike about the religious roles in conflict (see the book *Religion: the Missing Dimension of Statecraft*, by Douglas Johnston), religious roots tend too often to stay buried. But they are not far beneath the surface, and many religious leaders and institutions have deep traditions of peace-making. Why not capitalize on them?

The spiritual core of the Caux culture is particularly conducive to the kind of delving and honest discussion that are sorely needed. Caux is run by Initiatives of Change, an organization that describes itself as a

global movement. Its aim is reconciliation and building trust and it draws on both a fascinating history and an active current network.

Initiatives of Change began life as the Oxford Group, which morphed into Moral Rearmament. I am old enough to have dim and somewhat uneasy memories of MRA in the 1950s, associated in my recollection with a rather moralistic, humorless outlook and dogmatic anti-communist positions. I was fascinated to rediscover and reassess an organization that has played an important role in peace-making, particularly in the remarkable story of reconciliation of France and Germany after World War II. The Oxford Group was also influential in the creation of Alcoholics Anonymous, an organization which has brought real help to countless individuals and families.

Initiatives of Change took on its new name in 2001 but long before had built on its strong Christian evangelical roots to reach out to interfaith networks. The moral core still seems to be there but it is presented primarily as a centering on individual responsibility. Respect for each person's story is the essence of its process.

A jewel in the crown of Initiatives of Change is the gorgeous Caux Palace, a huge old structure high above Lake Geneva, with inspirational views of mountains and lakes. Caux was built as a grand hotel late in the 19th century and proudly displays guest books showing the noble parade of visitors who climbed the steep hill above Lake Geneva to enjoy the peace and beauty of the surroundings. Today, with support from the Swiss government, Caux hosts conferences and problem-solving groups each summer, many with reconciliation and conflict prevention as their prime goal.

Understanding and healing are part of the formula. Many attendees spoke of the 'miracle of Caux' and its ability to get even bitter opponents to stand side by side, perhaps even washing dishes, since participation in the community and its practical maintenance is part of the Caux culture.

The courage to dig down into root causes, to bring out bitter memories in an effort to shed some new light and show compassion and understanding is a marking and welcome feature of Caux. It offers one place where sensitive topics like religion can be treated seriously and respectfully as one of the strands of conflict and part of the solution.

Posted by Katherine Marshall on July 30, 2008 4:00 PM

Katherine Marshall

Katherine Marshall is a Senior Fellow at the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs, and Visiting Professor at Georgetown University in Washington DC. She has long experience on a wide range of development issues. At the World Bank (1971-2006), Ms Marshall focused on issues facing the world's poorest countries. She held a wide range of leadership positions and has led the World Bank's faith and ethics work since 2000. Ms. Marshall is part of the Council of 100, a World Economic Forum Initiative to advance understanding between the Islamic World and the West, a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and a Trustee of Princeton University. She is Executive Director of the World Faiths Development Dialogue.