



BREAKTHROUGHS

Initiatives of Change

FROM TRANSITION TO VISION

This issue of Breakthroughs includes our Annual Report for 2007-2008. It has been a year of significant transitions for Initiatives of Change (IofC). A new national office in Richmond and the addition of several young colleagues bring energy and diversity to our work. In particular, we would like to welcome Betsy Kelly as our communications director.

We have made solid progress towards balancing our budget by controlling costs; in addition, we thank our new contributors, as well as those who have given for many years, for our improving fiscal health. We are excited about the vision forming for IofC's future as we continue to shape our strategic priorities.

This vision includes a concentrated effort to engage emerging leaders in the work of building trust across divides of race, class and culture. We imagine a new generation partnering locally and nationally with more "seasoned" leaders, across political boundaries, to show how radically changed lives can give substance to hopes for a better future. Such partnerships could help communities break cycles of blame and resentment through honesty, reconciliation and acts of moral courage.

To do this, we must focus resources on training that will equip individuals for sustained work. Supporting them through mentoring, internships and global experiences must also be a priority.

As we build these and other new relationships at home, we Americans can also develop a healthier dialogue with the rest of the world. As we address the root causes of human insecurity – the hurts, fears and pride in every heart as well as larger issues of conflict and poverty – we will begin to build a sustainable future for everyone.

What is your vision for the United States and the role IofC might play in creating that future? How can you contribute to IofC's work in a way that brings us closer to that vision?

Rob Corcoran and Don Cowles



Richard Kananga and Jesse Markowitz

issues confronting U.S. communities and ways to create change. As I grew to know him better, I saw that Richard was a thoughtful and

(Continued on page 2)

MICHAEL SPELTIE

The revolution will not be televised.

There's a big difference between wanting a revolution and becoming the revolution. Gandhi said "Be the change you want to see in the world," but what does this really mean? Last summer at Caux—the IofC conference center in Switzerland—I caught a glimpse of what the world could look like if we moved past our own insecurities and egos.



Michael Speltie

Switzerland is full of excitement and wonder. When I got there the first thing that stood out was a white man in a suit serving me tea. Now, where I come from usually the only people serving are brown and poor. But there I was, getting served afternoon tea

(Continued on page 2)

RICHARD KANANGA and JESSE MARKOWITZ

By Jane Faulkner

When I first met Richard Kananga, I was struck by his presence. A young man from Rwanda, Richard came to Seattle in 2006 as part of ACTION, a leadership training and outreach program that explores



JESSICA LEE

Interviewed by Betsy Kelly



Jessica Lee

As an intern, what were your earliest impressions of Hope in the Cities (HIC)?

I first thought, okay, what do they actually do? But after a few weeks, it clicked. We were watching the *Healing the Heart of America* video, which documents a day in 1993 when people from 50 cities visited historical sites in Richmond as a way of acknowledging the 370-year history of black-white relations.

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(RICHARD, from page 1)

caring person whose deep faith had sustained him in difficult times.

I saw Richard again in 2008 in a video screened to thousands of children in Seattle. The occasion? Seeds of Compassion, an event organized in honor of the Dalai Lama's five-day visit and focused on the importance of compassion in caring for and educating our young people.

At the front of the packed Key Arena was 13-year-old Jessica (Jesse) Markowitz, who had been charged with welcoming the Dalai Lama. Like him, Jesse has changed the world through her compassion. It was Richard who first showed her the way.

Jesse met Richard in 2006, just as I did. He told her about the many Rwandans who suffered pain and loss during the genocide, and something sparked in her. Richard, who works with FACT, an organization that advocates against torture and violence, then connected Jesse with a small school in Rwanda for girls who lost family members in the genocide, and who now cannot afford many basic necessities, including school supplies.

Inspired, Jesse and her friends from the Seattle Girls School began to raise

money to help their counterparts in Rwanda. In the summer of 2007, Jesse went to Rwanda to disperse the funds that had been raised. When she met the girls, she noticed how sad and shy they seemed. Still, they expressed their gratitude to Jesse with smiles and hugs. Jesse talked to each girl, and they shared their stories. Jesse felt how important it was to support the girls



Richard and Jesse with the schoolgirls in Rwanda

so they could feel “empowered, become leaders, bring hope and show that they can forgive.”

When, Jesse returned home from Rwanda, she doubled the size of her club. She set a new goal of raising \$30,000 to build a school for “Jesse’s Girls,” as Richard had begun to call them. To date, the girls have raised \$7,000 from bake sales, the sale of donated goods, other fundraisers and a grant from a local business.

Their efforts to make a difference in

the lives of school girls in Rwanda also gained the attention of the Seattle Times, the New York Times and PBS, who filmed the video screened at the Seeds of Compassion event. This attention will no doubt ensure that the girls reach their goal. Jesse and her family plan to return to Rwanda again this summer, to distribute the funds and strengthen the human connection she so values with the girls.

Jesse Markowitz has learned that compassion does make a difference. “Be open, give hugs, say hello to a stranger; it will put a smile on their face,” she said. “You can do something no matter how old you are. It is so important for young people to do something now. We are, after all, the future leaders in the world.”

As is Richard, who had the courage to share his story, and in doing so unleash ripples of peace and compassion that impact people from Seattle to Rwanda and beyond. Thank you.

Jane Faulkner is a coach and healer for professional women in Seattle. A past practicing attorney, Jane found healing and inspiration during her own life and career transition at an interfaith conference at Caux. Jane co-hosted an ACTION group in Seattle in 2006. Some day, she hopes to bring her healing work to women in other countries.

(MICHAEL, from page 1)

by a business man. At Caux, they do not care what color or profession you are; everyone has to help run the place. Caux is a place of diversity, equality, spirituality, and tranquility – a true embodiment of community.

But the biggest thing Caux taught me had more to do with myself than anyone else. They place real big stress on “quiet time,” which took me a while to understand. Take some time each day to be alone with your thoughts or prayers, and just listen, they said. I tried but my mind did not want to be quiet. Or it was too quiet and I got sleepy. But after practicing for a

month, I got the gist of it and now take quiet time periodically. When my world seems to be crashing down around my feet I’ll take a breath, listen to my heart, and get back on track. Turns out our minds and bodies know what is best, and if we just take the time to listen, everything turns out ok.

Though I’ve finished my schooling, my final exams in life’s lessons were taken at Caux. Before my travels I was a young man angry at the world for the cards I was dealt in life. I dreamed of leading a world-wide revolution for equality and justice. Those fantasies were laid to rest when we visited the UN headquarters and I learned

how the world really works. Our governments are not ready to lay down the guns and start giving hugs. But that does not mean we have to follow their lead. While they go to war for oil, Caux prepares the world to go to war for peace. I have learned I don’t need to dream about becoming a leader—I am one already. The revolution continues every day as I learn to lay down my own judgments and send love to all that cross my path. Thank you, Caux, for showing me the potential of our species, and teaching me that my dreams are no different than my reality.

Michael Speltie is a 2007 Caux Scholar living in Los Angeles.

(JESSICA, from page 1)

Most nonprofits put on an event like that, and that's it. Here it was just the beginning. Tee [Turner, director of HIC, Richmond] and Cricket [White, director of training and facilitation] told me stories of what went into that day and what happened afterwards. I learned how honest conversation can lead to real change in people's lives.

What drives your interest in this work?

If you are a person of conscience you can see that there is something missing in our country right now. Most jobs just build on that status quo. But how can you work as, say, a nurse, when there is deep racial bias in this country's health care system? How can you work as an investment banker when there are obvious disparities in income levels? I'd rather work on changing the foundations that impact everyone.

Describe your work with HIC.

My main project has been to help organize events that introduce more young people to HIC. There's a lot of energy and passion among the youth, and they could be helped by engagement with a group like HIC, which has a long history of doing reconciliation work. And HIC cannot continue without these young people. We have new tools to offer, a different outlook, and we can help the movement grow with the times. On the other hand, HIC can educate us on the history that has led us to where we are today.

Where else do you see these generational differences?

In my generation, the divisions are more about class than race, although racial issues haven't entirely gone away. In a college classroom, everyone interacts. But when I go home to Hampton, Va., it's segregated by those who have education and those who don't. And those who don't tend to keep themselves segregated racially. If you are out of the system and have no means to express yourself, the differences become more important than the similarities. So the class barrier is

What would a more just Richmond community look like?

Could you paint a picture of your vision?

This spring, Hope in the Cities (HIC) encouraged several hundred people to reflect on that question at the First Fridays community art walk, one in a series of events that helps promote local arts and culture while revitalizing Richmond's downtown. By offering art supplies, a blank canvas, and thought-provoking questions, HIC turned the tables on those simply perusing the art galleries by asking them to create their own work of art.



“We asked, ‘Where do you see injustice in Richmond?’ and ‘What would a more just and inclusive Richmond community look like?’” said Matthew Freeman, a coordinator of the event. This creative dialogue spurred insightful commentary on the challenges facing the community and hopeful visions for its future.

The event also introduced the work of Hope in the Cities to a new, younger population—90 percent of participants were under 25—and encouraged these emerging leaders to engage in efforts to make those visions for the Richmond region's future a reality.

Learn more about Hope in the Cities at www.hopeinthecities.org.

—Matthew Freeman and Betsy Kelly



also one that needs to be challenged.

I'm multiracial and grew up in a low-income neighborhood. But I'd also go and visit family in richer areas. I never really fit in with any group, but I got to see different sides of the picture. If you don't have opportunities like that, then different groups don't translate—and they stay isolated.

What will you take away from your work with Hope in the Cities?

My collaborative skills have grown through working with people from other generations, and I have gained a better sense of the history behind the problems we are facing today. It has also been good to see the passion in

people, and the caring and support. When you see that day-to-day, you know it translates into the work. Social justice work can be overwhelming. Sometimes you wonder if what you are doing really matters. Here I've seen that a major impact on just a few people might do more than organizing something superficial for hundreds. It's more organic. And being able to have conversations about these issues at work, not in a complaining way, but so that your speech is moving toward something positive—that's refreshing. That excites me.

Jessica Lee is the student body president at Virginia Commonwealth University and an HIC intern. Betsy Kelly is the communications director for lofC.



WHERE RACIAL HEALING HAPPENS

By Rob Corcoran

This commentary first appeared in the Christian Science Monitor on May 15, 2008.

Shortly after Senator Obama's speech on race, a friend likened the racial issue to an old coffee pot that keeps percolating. Every few years something happens to bring the vexed problem bubbling to the surface.

Unplugging the percolator requires courageous conversation and frank acknowledgment of the underlying sources of distrust.

My friend, Mike McQuillan, is an educator, a veteran community organizer and former Senate adviser. He played a key role in establishing the Crown Heights Coalition in New York after confrontations between Hasidic Jews and blacks in 1991.

"Change emanates from the bottom," he said, pointing to important progress over the past two decades. And he's right: Ordinary people are coming together to do extraordinary things. Healing conversation is already underway.

In hundreds of local efforts across the U.S., diverse groups of citizens are bridging the traditional boundaries of race, class, and culture. Thousands have engaged in dialogue, symbolic acts of reconciliation and collaborative problem solving. Organizations like Everyday Democracy and Hope in the Cities (a project of Initiatives of Change) are facilitating this.

Two critical components create space for real dialogue: Not pointing the finger of blame, but extending a hand of friendship. And insisting on bringing everyone to the table, even those with whom we most disagree.

By treating people as potential allies rather than branding them enemies we

can focus on solving problems instead of continuing to glare at each other from self-righteous and isolated positions.

Dialogue is more than "just talk." Consider Richmond, Va., a city deeply divided by its history as the former capital of the Confederacy and site of a prominent slave market. Dialogue laid the groundwork for a Civil War center that tells the story from the perspective of Unionists, Confederates, as well as African-Americans—a first in the nation. Last year more than 5,000 people celebrated the unveiling of a reconciliation statue as a step in healing the memory of the transatlantic slave trade.

Trust, built through honest conversation, built the foundation for change.

The Richmond newspaper once notorious for supporting massive resistance to integration now hosts regular "public square" meetings for citizens to voice their views. A corporate leader who has taken part in dialogues says he is committed to making Richmond "a place where the economic wealth is shared proportionally by the diversity of the community." Conservatives and liberals are learning to work together to build a just and inclusive community.

Conversations with change makers confirm that this opportune moment extends across the country. A commentary in which John Graham of the Giraffe Project admitted with shame his fleeting question about the competency of a black airline pilot prompted an outpouring of e-mails and of similar honest sharing.

The key to healing is in provoking and then sustaining this honest conversation among ordinary citizens. Productive conversation demands readiness by all stakeholders to hold themselves, their communities and institutions accountable and willing to change where

change is needed.

A starting place might be an acknowledgment by white Americans that history provides little reason for black communities to trust the motives of white leaders. They might say, "It is true that in many communities we resisted integration and then abandoned the system and placed our children in suburban or private schools. We constructed highways that tore the heart out of established African-American neighborhoods. We contributed to the concentration of poverty by concentrating public housing in specific inner city neighborhoods and refused them in the suburbs. We participated in the disinvestment of the city."

How might the members of the African-American community begin the conversation? They might say, "For too long we have nursed historical grievances, played the racial guilt card, and been reluctant to acknowledge progress made. We have often blamed others while neglecting to care for our own communities and abandoning our young people to drugs and violence. We have allowed some of our leaders to put political power and patronage above the health of the community."

Both black and white could say, "We have remained silent when we should have spoken out. We have been resistant to change."

America's story is complex and interwoven. It defies easy stereotyping. By honoring each other's stories and accepting shared responsibility for change, we can heal the wounds of this country and forge something of incalculable value for a world torn by conflicts rooted in historical grievance and competing identities.

Rob Corcoran is the national director of Initiatives of Change. His forthcoming book, Trustbuilders, will be published by University of Virginia Press.

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2007 ANNUAL REPORT

Initiatives of Change grew stronger in 2007.

The development this year of a unifying strategic vision focused our attention on engaging emerging leaders and supporting their efforts to build trust, in the United States and with the world, across lines of race, class and culture. With your generous support and under the leadership of our National Director, Rob Corcoran, our teams are moving this vision forward through three major initiatives.

The work of our Washington, D.C., team centers on advancing the idea that the causes of human insecurity must be addressed by national and global efforts. We will work to bring together this summer peace builders from around the globe, as well as our Caux Scholars Program alumni, to discuss this issue at IofC President Mohamed Sahnoun's first Caux Forum for Human Security.

Our Hope in the Cities team in Richmond, Va., is poised to play a key role in the unfolding Richmond metropolitan region visioning process. By connecting young business, government, nonprofit and grassroots leaders, we can help Richmond build a stronger community.

Alongside our paid staff team, a U.S. network of seasoned change agents stands ready to engage a new generation of emerging leaders in the work of reconciliation. We will work to facilitate these mentoring partnerships by transforming existing Initiatives of Change equipping programs into a cohesive training and support system for new leaders.

Under the careful guidance of our Executive Director, Don Cowles, 2007 was also a year of organizational restructuring, leading to a strengthening of our financial position.

- Revenues from our operations grew 8.9%.
- Operating expenses declined 6.2%.
- Richmond operations were consolidated into a new office.
- Net assets grew 5.1%.

With more focused goals and stronger financial base, we entered 2008 a healthier and more vital organization.

In accord with this restructuring, our Executive Director, Don Cowles, has recommended that we reexamine the job description of the Executive Director, and that he redirect his service to the organization by stepping down from this position to become a volunteer. Under this recommendation, I, as Chairman of the Board, would assume the nominal duties of the Executive Director, pending our review of the job description as recommended by Don.

With deep gratitude, both for his service and for his insightful analysis of our funding and staffing requirements, the Board has accepted Don's recommendation. Don intends to follow his personal call to work directly in the Richmond community, including working with Hope in the Cities toward the goal of transforming Richmond, Va., into a center of excellence for reconciliation. His service as executive director has been invaluable, and his continuing commitment to one of our key initiatives is an inspiration. Thank you, Don.

The Board has reaffirmed its confidence in Rob Corcoran and his leadership as our National Director. Our restructuring efforts under Don's guidance are designed to strengthen and enable this leadership, as Rob seeks to build support for our work throughout the United States, in Washington, Richmond and elsewhere.

We are deeply grateful for the ways in which God continues to lead this remarkable and diverse fellowship. We have seen IofC's central idea – change yourself to change the world – gain greater acceptance. Now, our common task is to inspire more Americans to take this idea to heart, in all aspects of their lives. We look forward to continuing with you on this journey.

Marshall Green
Chairman of the Board
Initiatives of Change - USA

THAN

Initiatives of Change is grateful for the many ways in which people and organizations contribute to our work. Your gifts are the reason we are able to continue to come together to build trust across divides in our communities and around the world.

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Church
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Microsoft Giving Campaign
Owens & Minor, Inc.
Performance Food Group
Philip Morris, USA
SunTrust Banks, Inc.
Tredgar Corporation
Ukrop's Super Markets, Inc.
UPS Freight
Verizon
Wachovia Bank, N.A.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Initiatives of Change

I OF C WELCOMES TWO NEW BOARD MEMBERS

Initiatives of Changes elected two new members to the Board of Directors in February. We are pleased to announce that Jack McHale and Krish Raval have joined the Board. Welcome!

Jack, a former county supervisor, is active in the Richmond, Va., community and regional cooperation efforts. He also serves as chairman of the board of Hope in the Cities.

Krish, a native of Ethiopia raised in the United Kingdom, is the founder of Learn to Lead. He is a senior fellow at the JMB Academy of Leadership at the University of Maryland and a conflict mediator at the United Nations.

Jack and Krish fill seats vacated by Chris Evans and Michael Henderson. We are extremely grateful to Chris and Michael for their years of dedicated service to Initiatives of Change.

U.S. BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Donald T. Cowles, *executive director*
 William S. Elliott
 Marshall M. Green, *chairman*
 Kathleen R. Johnson, *treasurer*
 Rev. E. Terri LaVelle
 Carolyn M. Leonard
 Connie K. McCormick
 Jack McHale
 Krish Raval
 Richard W.B. Ruffin
 Andrew D. Webster

	2007	2006
Revenues		
Contributions & Legacies	\$ 485,000	\$ 476,000
Domestic Grants	10,000	15,000
Activities	26,000	7,000
Dividends & Interest	262,000	237,000
Property Sales & Miscellaneous	34,000	15,000
Sale of Richmond Center	319,000	
Total	\$1,136,000	\$ 750,000
Expenses		
General Program	\$ 612,000	\$ 509,000
Designated Initiatives	326,000	383,000
Medical & Retirement Assistance	58,000	71,000
Administration	188,000	296,000
Depreciation	16,000	20,000
Total, before non-recurring item	\$1,200,000	\$1,279,000
Non-recurring Retirement/Restructuring Expense	\$ 86,000	\$ 627,000
Net Increase (Shortfall)	(\$ 150,000)	(\$1,156,000)
Net Assets—End of Year	\$9,364,000	\$8,913,000

Audited financial statements are available from the corporate office or from the New York Department of State, Office of Charities Registration. IofC is recognized as a 501 (c) (3) organization, gifts to which are tax-deductible for federal income tax purposes.

INITIATIVES OF CHANGE STAFF

Kathy Aquilina, Director, Caux Scholars Program
 Rob Corcoran, National Director
 Don Cowles, Executive Director
 Betsy Kelly, Director of Communications
 Dick Ruffin, International Association
 Debbie Robison, Assistant Treasurer
 Cricket G. White, Training and Facilitation Director

Charles Aquilina, Middle East/Interfaith Initiatives
 Susan P. Corcoran, Business and Event Manager
 Matthew Freeman, Community Facilitator
 Shari Osborn, Director of Development
 Randy Ruffin, Caux Scholars Program
 Sylvester Turner, Director, Hope in the Cities,
 Richmond

International Caux Conferences 2008

Caux Conferences 2008

Addressing the Root Causes of Human Insecurity

Please consider joining lofC at the conferences taking place this summer at Caux, our conference center in Switzerland.

July 3-9

Global Servant-Leadership:
Contributing to Human
Security

July 11-16

Trust and Integrity in the
Global Economy (TIGE):
Cultivating Knowledge -
Generating Action

July 18-23

Addressing the
Root Causes
of Human Insecurity

July 25-August 1

Tools for Change

August 3-10

Renewal Arts:
Can Artists Mend
a Broken World?

August 12-17

Developing Cultural
Dialogue: Learning to Live
Together with Difference

[www.iofc.org/en/
conferences/caux/](http://www.iofc.org/en/conferences/caux/)

ADDRESSING THE ROOT CAUSES OF HUMAN INSECURITY

By Dick Ruffin

This summer, peace builders from around the world will explore how an annual Caux Forum for Human Security might enhance global responses to the human insecurity that pervades communities world-wide.

"Something needs to be added to the efforts made by peace builders to bring peace and security to people living in war-torn areas," said Ambassador Mohamed Sahnoun, president of Initiatives of Change - International. "It is not only my vision but the vision of lofC that people attending this Caux Forum will discover the secret of lofC, of changing ourselves in order to make a world with more solidarity, with more love."



This vision for Caux as a resource for the world's peace builders is gathering momentum. Many outstanding individuals have responded to Sahnoun's invitation to gather in Caux, July 18-23.

Respondents include those working at the heart of efforts to resolve international conflicts and focus the world's attention on the root causes of human insecurity. Among them are two current heads of state, one former prime minister of Australia, several current or recently serving cabinet officers, diplomats, academics, leaders of civil society organizations, senior journalists and scores of others doing essential work at the grass roots level.

Americans planning to attend include diplomats, a former moderator of the Presbyterian Church, the head of a prominent NGO active in the Middle East and Africa, a former president of the National Press Club, and the president of the J. William & Harriet

Fulbright Center.

Another sign that the vision is spreading is the decision by the Swiss Department of Foreign Affairs to give CHF 50,000 in support of our effort. In addition, at least four people from the ministry plan to attend.

At Caux, we hope to create an atmosphere where each learns from the others. The work of those with practical, grassroots experiences will be highlighted through a series of case studies that illustrate the positive and often unexpected outcomes that flow from changed lives and an honest search for God's leading.

Conference activities will focus on five themes, giving equal time to diagnosis and appropriate responses.

- Human insecurity induced by social and economic condition;
- Human insecurity induced by degradation of the environment;
- Human insecurity in a world of religious and cultural differences;
- Human insecurity linked with armed conflict and
- Human insecurity springing from wounded memories.

While many challenges stand before us, we are convinced that the small steps we take this summer at Caux will lay the foundation for future forums—and contribute to long-term efforts to address the need for human security around the world.

Dick Ruffin is the executive vice-president of Initiatives of Change - International.

RAJMOHAN GANDHI VISITS WASHINGTON, DC

By Dick Ruffin

“When you see wrong, do something about it, but also consider whether you have some responsibility for it. Fight, but turn the searchlight inwards.”

Rajmohan Gandhi said this was his grandfather’s message for our times as he read excerpts from his new award-winning biography, *Gandhi, The Man, His People and the Empire* (University of California Press, 2008), for an audience of approximately 100 people at the National Press Club on May 7.

Gandhi also emphasized his grandfather’s refusal to treat even his strongest opponents as enemies. He recalled how, as a small boy at his grandfather’s last interfaith prayer meetings, he had been struck by the friendly responses Mohandas Gandhi gave to angry and confrontational Hindus who felt he was too close to the Muslims.



Rep. John Lewis with Rajmohan Gandhi.

Gandhi’s biography is the first to provide a fully balanced account of the Mahatma’s life, the development of his beliefs, his political campaigns and his complex relations with his family. At the reading, Gandhi explored such diverse matters as the Mahatma’s relationship with Winston Churchill, his attitudes toward the untouchables and

his final acquiescence to the partition of the subcontinent, which he had long opposed.

Following the reading, NPC past President John P. Cosgrove produced a surprise: a 78-rpm recording of Gandhi giving a rare talk in English. The original, brought from India by journalist Alfred Wagg in the late 1940s, now resides in the National Archives. Rajmohan Gandhi said this new discovery was a significant addition to the record of Gandhi’s life.

Gandhi’s visit to Washington included stops at the George Washington University Law School, where he offered a comparative perspective of Lincoln and Gandhi, the World Bank, and a meeting with Rep. John Lewis, who said, “If it hadn’t been for the spirit of Gandhi in those early years [of the civil rights struggle], we would not have made it.”



IofC Celebrates Asia Plateau

Eight Americans joined 250 others from 32 countries to celebrate the extraordinary contributions of IofC’s Asia Plateau center in Panchgani, India, on the occasion of its 40th anniversary in January.

One participant said his return to AP was a shot in the arm after “losing my sense of wonderment and enthusiasm for new life adventures. The center offers more than a beacon of hope: it is where dreams are woven and fashioned into reality.”

Learn more about Asia Plateau at www.in.iofc.org/ap/



A NEW VISION FOR THE AMERICAS

By Rob Corcoran

Could the Americas be a bridge between rich and poor, raise awareness of the sanctity of life and human dignity, and be an example of unity for the rest of the world?

That was the question for the more than 70 people gathered for the 13th Meeting of the Americas in March at Sitio Sao Luiz, the lofC center in Petropolis, Brazil. Over nine days together, representatives of Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, Uruguay, Honduras, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Canada, France, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and the United States explored the possibilities and challenges of building a “continental spirit” that might connect individuals and countries on a path toward change.

The conference included a four-part workshop on building and sustaining diverse teams, led by Rob and Susan Corcoran from the United States with Killy Sanchez of Guatemala and Ismar Villavicencio of Honduras.



Luis Puig (in blue vest), head of lofC in Brazil, chats with Roberval Teles and João Ricardo

said she was determined to build a bridge between the social classes in Bogotá.

“I thought I was very aware. But when the government began to publish figures about the minimum wage, I realized that many times I would spend in one day what someone earning a minimum wage earns in a month. It changed me in terms of responsibility.”

The group from Argentina reported on the official launching of the lofC association in their country a few days earlier, while community leaders from Rio de Janeiro explained how applying the principles of Initiatives of Change had enabled them to reclaim gang and drug



Encontro das Americas - The Meeting of the Americas 2008



Brazilians Alline Serpa, Rita Oliveira, Lena Serpa and Joelina Cândida

infested neighborhoods where violence is endemic.

“The movement of Latin Americans into the United States each day is changing the country,” Susan Corcoran said. This sometimes results in tense relations between U.S. citizens and these new arrivals. The United States is “like the big elephant of the Americas, that tramples the grass when it moves. We need the help of friends in Latin America so that we learn to move with the herd.”

Opportunities for honest conversation led participants to describe their personal experiences of conflict as well as their hopes for overcoming divides.

Helena Salazar of Colombia

Ismar Villavicencio expressed a similar wish to create a common vision. “As Latins, we must grow up and stop feeling inferior to others,” he said. “We must have an objective beyond ourselves so that when difficulties arise we have something to unite us.”

By the end of the conference, the group had identified many points of connection. “We could share in three languages our realities and realize that we (have) similar hopes and suffer the same problems. We have a distorted image of other countries because of the media,” said Maria Cristina Muñoz of Bogotá. Another Latin American woman echoed her experience. “I used to think that



Alline Serpa and Helena Salazar

everyone came to exploit us,” she said. “Here I learned to exchange experiences. People from the asphalt roads can work with people from unpaved roads.”

BREAKTHROUGHS

is a free publication of Initiatives of Change

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Initiatives of Change - USA
is a diverse network that
has worked to build relationships
of trust across the world's divides
for more than 60 years.

www.us.iofc.org



In January, Initiatives of Change made a formal commitment to act to reduce our environmental footprint in our personal lives, in our homes, in our centers, in our travel, and anywhere else where we might be using more than our fair share of the earth's resources.

In line with this commitment, we are working to shift a greater portion of our print communications to electronic formats. You can help by agreeing to receive IofC publications via email or email links, when available.

If you would like to support this effort to reduce our impact on the environment, please confirm your email address by sending a message to info@us.iofc.org with the subject line **IofC GREEN**. Thank you!!

COMING EVENTS

Metropolitan Richmond Summer Forum

please call for more information

Connecting Communities Trustbuilding Program

Oct. 21 - 25, 8:30 am - 4 pm **and**
Nov. 7 - 8, 4 pm - 4 pm (overnight)

Metropolitan Richmond Day

Nov. 20, 7:30 - 11:30 am

www.hopeinthecities.org
www.us.iofc.org

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Initiatives of Change



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