2009 was a watershed year for two reasons. Firstly, certain structural changes have been made to cope with changing economic and social realities, and to find ways of engaging younger generations in the work of Initiatives of Change (IofC) in Canada. Secondly, a bold new experiment - the first of its kind and one that is uniquely Canadian - the Caravan of Dialogues for Peace has been initiated in Quebec province to address bridge-building needs among diverse communities there, and perhaps to serve as a model for other regions in Canada.

BRIDGE-BUILDING INITIATIVES

Over the course of 2009 Initiatives of Change in Canada has continued to work, through teams of people in different cities and communities, to build bridges of trust at points of stress within the Canadian fabric. At the heart of this undertaking has been the use of a powerful instrument – The Imam and the Pastor, an international award-winning film which documents the reconciliation of bitter enemies and their subsequent effort to build trust between divided communities in Nigeria and beyond. The film provides an effective catalyst for dialogue where trust has been eroded and relationships are at risk. In the current debate over reasonable accommodation in multicultural Canada it is helping people of different cultural and religious identity to know and understand each other better.

Honest conversations between cultures

In Toronto, Canada’s most populous and multicultural city, members of faith communities have been challenged to let go of traditional reserve and welcome what others bring. This was vividly demonstrated when leaders of the Muslim and Christian communities were invited to a Jewish synagogue for an evening featuring a showing of The Imam and the Pastor, one of a series of events initiated by a young Syrian-born woman, Iman Al Ghafari, acting both out of personal conviction and in her capacity as IofC Regional Coordinator.

The audience of 300 heard from representatives of the three Abrahamic faiths. Rabbi Jonathan Crane, commenting on the reconciliation between the Imam and the Pastor, said “Their courage and compassion are meaningful precisely because each remains true to his own tradition without insisting that his is more valid than his neighbour’s...Our common interest is to live in a community where differences are not denigrated but rather celebrated.”

As a result of one of its members viewing the film, the Council of Religious Leaders of Montréal-Nord decided to use it as a tool to move leaders and people towards greater harmony in that area, where street violence had been front page news.

IofC took an active part in the Montreal Festival of Peace where an outdoor presentation of L’Imam et le Pasteur was given, and Keltoum Boumedjane, project manager for the promotion of the film, sat on a panel with other young people to discuss the theme of non-violence.

The first public screening of the French language version of the film in Ottawa took place at Saint Paul University in January - a collaboration between IofC and the Conflict Studies program of the university. “Before seeing the film, I didn’t think reconciliation was possible,” said a student from Burundi, “but now I know it is. Without hope, you’re at the end of the road. When you have hope, you can go on.”
Reported in the Prairies

A report of a showing of The Imam & the Pastor at Luther College, University of Regina in January appeared on the front page of The Prairie Messenger, a publication of the Catholic Church that covers parochial news as well as current world affairs and is circulated widely through Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

Caravan of Dialogues for Peace
Emerging from our solitudes

Through an initiative developed in 2009, IofC’s Quebec team is currently in the process of organizing a series of dialogues to build bridges of trust across cultural, religious and other dividing lines. Using the film l’Imam et le Pasteur as an ice-breaker, the Caravan will stop in various cities and communities that have requested such visits and facilitate meaningful conversations on interfaith, intercultural and ethical issues, with the goal of creating positive relationships based on trust and understanding. Organizers are currently engaged in the task of setting up local host committees to determine the program of activities during Caravan stopovers.

Peace Circles

Creators of Peace is an international program that aims to empower women at the grass roots to be part of community peace building. One aspect of this initiative has been the development of Peace Circles designed to bring women together to explore their peace creating capabilities. Small groups of women commit to meet regularly over a period of weeks or months to work through a series of ‘gathering points’ focused on the nature of peace, good listening, inner peace, forgiveness and so on.

Over a period of six weeks in April and May, a group of women in Richmond, BC gathered to explore what it means to be creators of peace - in the first of many IofC Peace Circles in Canada. “What I got out of it was a specific place I can start to be a peacemaker - within my own family,” said one participant. The facilitators were touched by the depth of sharing among the women and openness to explore the concept of peace and change. Peace Circles have taken place and are planned in other cities.

YOUTH INITIATIVES

In keeping with the renewed focus on youth, IofC has begun some new projects, and strengthened others already in place. The IofC Club at the University of Calgary held a series of meetings in the Spring of ’09 with themes such as What kind of a world do I want? Visions for Peace and Building Bridges of Trust. Events in the fall included a fundraiser for Save Life Sudan and an introduction to the Compass Program, which, as the name implies, is designed to help students find direction in life.

Also in Calgary, IofC, in partnership with the Interfaith Youth Council, has facilitated biweekly meetings for up to 12 youth from 6 different faith communities. Through dialogue they discussed shared values; through artistic expression they learned about each other, through action in community projects they put their values into action.

In Quebec City steps are being taken to build a team of young adults through the initiative of Vanja Hodzik, with the aim that they become actively involved in the Caravan project. While in Toronto local initiatives are being led more and more by the new generation.

PEACEBUILDING AND HUMAN SECURITY

Many who have come here from areas of conflict wish to remain engaged in the search for a better future for their countries of origin. Building on this, IofC Canada sought to develop a project in Southern Sudan. The first step was the participation in the Caux Forum for Human Security in July 2009, of a senior delegation from the Government of Southern Sudan. This led to a request to develop an initiative to build capacity for ethical governance. The basic concept is in place and funding is being sought for the pilot, which is scheduled to begin in 2010.

Two Canadian Sudanese, who have returned to work in Sudan, were part of the Government of Southern Sudan delegation to Caux, led by the Vice President Dr. Riek Machar. They were George Achor, then Under Secretary
for Presidential Affairs in the Office of the President and William Deng Deng, Chairman of the Southern Sudan Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission.

Jemma Kumba, the first woman governor in her country, said that “The topics for this forum were so relevant for the issues that I deal with daily.” She left Caux with “a new thinking, a new mind, new experiences, and the level of my trauma has been reduced, because I have met friends who listened to my story.”

Also taking part in the Caux Forum was Pam White, Director of the Community and Social Justice Division, Justice Institute of BC. “Participants openly shared their life stories and painted pictures of war, poverty, hunger, conflict and hardship. In the midst of this horror, optimism, commitment, dedication and resilience was palpable,” she commented.

RENEWAL, INTERACTION, TRAINING

The IofC international centre in Caux, Switzerland is a valuable resource, which provides a unique environment for personal renewal and global inter-action. Many inspired initiatives in Canada have resulted from what Canadians have gained from the summer gatherings, conferences and programs that Caux offers. In 2009, a significant number of Canadians took part as organizers, facilitators, assistants, interns, panelists or simply as participants.

The Caux Intern Program provides training in leadership and intercultural skills, while contributing to the effective functioning of the conferences in a spirit of hospitality and service. Two students, one from UBC and the other from Calgary, took part in the one-month program.

The Caux Scholars Program focuses on the moral and spiritual dimensions of peacebuilding and on the relationship between individual transformation and change in the world. Students have the opportunity to explore the role individuals can play in bringing healing and in building a future where peace, justice and individual freedom flourish. The course examines the personal, religious, social and cultural factors which create and sustain conflict, as well as how to deal with differences. Ladan Assemi from West Vancouver, one of three Canadian Caux Scholars in 2009, says, “You cannot be a part of Caux and not be transformed in some profound way. I realized that if we approach a conflict with an inquisitive mind and the intention to understand rather than convince the other parties, transformative change can be brought about.”

Action for Life (AfL), which is run by IofC in Asia over a period of ten months, aims to mobilize a new generation of change makers equipped with integrity and faith: people committed to bringing transformation and healing in themselves and the world. Nejla Azima from Toronto took part in the 2008/09 AfL program. Peter Heyes from Alberta and Gwen McLean from Saskatchewan have acted as mentors for those taking the course.
Initiatives of Change Association (Canada)  ANNUAL REPORT 2009

Building trust across the world’s divides

Initiatives of Change is a global network open to people of all nationalities, cultures, religions and beliefs who work toward change locally and globally, starting with change in their own lives. It has been active on every continent for over 60 years.

Initiatives of Change Association (Canada) is a member of Initiatives of Change International, which affiliates national IofC associations worldwide and has Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC).

For more information visit www.ca.iofc.org

Contact information

Head Office
Suite 402, 331 Cooper Street
Ottawa, ON K2P 0G5
tel: 613-230-7197
e-mail: iofc.ottawa@ca.iofc.org

Management Team
Bill Parker - Interim Director of Advancement (403-270-0975)
Richard Weeks - Interim Director of Administration (613-230-7197)
Eve Wojciechowska - Director of Programs (613-230-7197)

Quebec City
Lucie Pagé tel: 418-623-2217

Montreal
Laurent Gagnon tel: 514-364-9808

Ottawa
Rosalind Weeks tel: 613 523-6480

Toronto
Iman Al Ghafari tel: 647-400-1737

Regina
Gwen McLean tel: 306-522-7388

Edmonton
Jenny Bocock tel: 780-458-1290

Calgary
Keith Newman tel: 403-208-1602
IofC office: 403-270-0975

Vancouver
Anne Hartnell tel: 604-575-1264

Council of Management
Benoît Charlebois - Chair/Treasurer
Joy Newman - Vice Chair
Leann Marsh - Secretary
Lorraine Généreux
Genevieve LeBaron
Alvin Manitopyes

Accountant
Wayne Friesen

Investment Advisor
Don Douglas, RBCDS

Legal Counsel
MacKay & Sharp
Ottawa, Ontario

Auditors
Nyrose & Saito LLP
Lethbridge, Alberta

Finances

Initiatives of Change Association (Canada), incorporated since 1944, is a registered charitable organization [Business No. 11904 5912 RR0001] and donations are tax deductible.

IofC Canada is indebted to many individuals for their financial contributions and countless hours of volunteer help.

Revenue for the year, from all sources (including legacies), was $677,017 against expenditure of $432,361, resulting in an excess of revenue over expenditure of $244,656. These are pre-audit figures and are subject to change following completion of the annual audit.

Audited financial statements for the year ended December 31, 2009, will be circulated to the membership and are available, on request, from the Initiatives of Change office in Ottawa.

Publications, Video and DVD Resources

MRA Books, for the production and distribution of literature, is managed by Rosalind Weeks in Ottawa, Ontario. Business Number: 11904 5912 RR0002

MRA Productions North America, for the production and distribution of NTSC Video and DVDs, is managed by Christopher Hartnell in Surrey, BC. Business Number: 11904 5912 RR0003

Books and Video

No Enemy to Conquer by Michael Henderson
Forward by the Dalai Lama. This book offers dramatic evidence that validates the power of forgiveness and personal reconciliation to effect national life.

The Imam & the Pastor
Award winning documentary from FLTFilms - From vengeance and killing to healing and forgiveness...a moving story of grass-roots peace building that gives hope to humanity.

To view and order all current resources visit www.ca.iofc.org/resources/

aussi disponible en français