



Panelists for Spiritual Resources for Building Trust
Left to right: Scott Perkins, Azhar Hussain, Sarah Beller, Tee Turner.

PEOPLE BUILDING TRUST

Trust: Factor it in.

While the Occupy Wall Street protests exposed deep divides in the USA, a group in Washington DC were building trust and dialogue. Mary Ella Keblusek reports on The Trust Factor.

A year ago when we began our planning, we couldn't have known how relevant this theme and location would be,' says Rob Corcoran, National Director of Initiatives of Change USA. 'With the US government in paralysis, financial systems closing down, and the global order in chaos, holding such an event in Washington DC – the nation's capital and centre of power – magnified the impact of our work. It also created a sense of focus and urgency among the more than one hundred participants who joined us during this week.'

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The Trust Factor was a series of panels, dialogues, workshops and other events held in venues throughout Washington DC from 10 to 15 October. The events brought together a diverse group of people from Washington and beyond to explore the need for trust in politics, race, economics and religion.

An essential part of building trust is teamwork. The foundation for a successful Trust Factor week was laid from the beginning, with a spirit of partnership that

brought together young leadership from an impressive array of more than 10 organizations with local, national and global outreach, including educational institutions, local and international NGOs, and the diplomatic community.

IofC USA brought its own unique contribution, challenging individuals to consider their own responsibility as citizens to create a more 'trustworthy' world. Said Corcoran, 'While it is easy to blame those in power for the problems we are experiencing, millions living in the USA and other developed countries have been living beyond their means for years, unwilling to think of the long-term consequences.'

The result was a rich set of experiences, a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the nature of trust, and newly-forged relationships and partnerships, prepared to move forward together to continue the exploration.

One of the highlights of the week was the honouring of four renowned trustbuilders at a reception hosted by Australian Ambassador HE the Honorable Kim Beazley, who used these words to describe a trustbuilder: 'Our societies are ready for humans who lead in humility, listen to others, and exercise their conscience.'

The awards were given to trustbuilders in the local, national and international domains. Terry Flood, Co-Founder and Executive Director of Jubilee Jobs, has helped over 22,000 people in the DC area obtain jobs and self-sufficiency, working to build trust across



economic divides. Dr Gail Christopher, Vice-President for Programs at the WK Kellogg Foundation, received the national award for leading her organization to a commitment to address racial healing and inequities.

The international awards were given to two individuals with the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy (ICRD): Dr Douglas Johnston, Founder and President, and Azhar Hussain, Senior Vice-President for Preventive Diplomacy. ICRD has helped the US foreign policy establishment and academia to focus on the importance of understanding and respecting the faith of those in other cultures in the context of diplomatic efforts. Hussain's work using religion as part of the peace-making process has brought partnerships and leadership training to Pakistan and other conflict areas.

Two events during The Trust Factor focused on the systemic problems in the financial system. Lester Myers, an attorney, CPA, Georgetown University professor and Caux Roundtable Fellow, described the Great Recession as a vast failure in trust at almost every level: bank officers, borrowers, regulators, corporate executives, credit agencies, politicians, lawyers, CPAs and the media. 'Each group pursued its own agenda, while remaining morally oblivious and even wilfully blind to the impact of their actions on others.'

Myers notes the root of the problem may lie with a misunderstanding of the Founding Fathers' intentions. 'Rather than the narcissistic fulfillment of rugged individualism, George Washington and other founders intended we each be responsible, not *for* each other in chronic dependency, but *to* each other as autonomous and equal, yet interdependent, decision makers who think first of the long-term good for the country.'

'None of us is responsible for the wounds of the past, but we are all responsible for the acts of repair'

In a panel discussion on socially responsible investing led by the Calvert Foundation, we learned that, in fact, individuals have much more economic power than most realize. The panel encouraged more careful consideration of who we choose to bank and invest with, so that our money can support local needs, instead of anonymous global projects with little oversight or accountability. They noted that, despite the global recession and economic turmoil, there has been a 35% increase in assets invested in community-oriented and socially responsible funds, which are now competitive with other more traditional investments.

A particular focus of the week was an issue endemic to the US: the legacy of America's history of slavery and racism and the resulting inequities in today's social structures. IofC USA's national program, Hope in the Cities, addresses race relations, and so the issue was considered in several events.

A workshop on trust-building tools for racial healing and community change, led by Rob Corcoran and Tee Turner of IofC USA, focused on creating an environment where difficult truths can be spoken, allowing healing and cooperation. 'None of us is responsible for the wounds of the past, but we are all responsible for the acts of repair,' explained Turner. Community leader Dushaw Hocket summed up his participation: 'Trust is fragile and is based on our ability to embrace and hold multiple and competing truths, allowing individuals to accept the facts, while maintaining hope for a more trusting future.'

To further deepen our understanding of race relations in the US, John W Franklin, director of international partnerships for the soon-to-be-built National Museum of African American History and Culture, gave a private tour for Trust Factor participants of an exhibit on the struggle for civil rights.

Building trust in the civic arena was the area addressed by Dr Carl Stauffer of the Eastern Mennonite University and Academic Director of the Caux Scholars Program, who spent many years in South Africa as part of the peace process. 'We are smarter as a collective than we are as individuals,' he began, 'but there is a void of democratic space between the government and the citizenry.' To address this void, Stauffer and others encouraged greater participation in the democratic process, as well as intentional relationship building with elected and community leaders, to build the foundation of trust needed to heal the deep divisions being experienced across the country.

In the final panel of the week, addressing civic participation and responsibility in building trust in public life, panelist Mee Moua of the Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum, and a former state senator, encouraged participants to remember the humanity of elected officials. 'We must create authentic relationships with our civic and elected leaders, instead of transactional relationships where we only contact them when we need something.'

The Trust Factor week was a success on many levels. It demonstrated the power of broad collaboration with partners and showed the importance of considering trust from many perspectives. The deep impact on participants was evidenced in the trust-building commitments they shared: 'I want to be vulnerable enough to tell one of my close friends a story about one of my weakest moments in life.' 'I want to be as I say I am.' 'I will boldly step toward a person that broke trust... to risk a conversation with no attachment to the outcome.' 'I will build trust by taking the risk to believe in other people.'

In the final moments of The Trust Factor week, the excitement was palpable. It is clear this is only the beginning. The 'trust' conversation will continue in DC, and migrate in various forms to other locations. For more stories from The Trust Factor, check out www.us.iofc.org/trust-factor-news.