About Initiatives of Change

Initiatives of Change International (IOCI International) is a non-governmental organization (NGO) working for peace, reconciliation and human security worldwide. It has Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, and Participatory Status in the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. It stresses the importance of personal responsibility, ethical leadership and building trust across the world’s divides.

Based in Caëx, Switzerland, IOCI International was founded in 2002 as an association bringing together the autonomous national bodies of the Initiatives of Change movement which are active in 39 countries, many of them over several decades.

Initiatives of Change, a diverse yet dynamic movement for transformation, is gearing itself to act with greater focus and cohesion. Its new unified and restructured International Council, mandated to give fresh leadership, includes two young professionals who last year accompanied then President Rajmonan Gandhi on a 14-nation mission.

While Egyptians were massing in Tahrir Square, young Africans inspired by IOCI assembled in Kenya to launch a network of ‘changemakers’ in eight eastern African states. As their public demonstration, they chanted: ‘We are the change generation and we’ll make significant contributions of our time and skills. Accounts of national societies are audited annually and are available on request.

Initiatives of Change International receives occasional grants for specific projects from governments and private foundations, and is supported by contributions from individuals and its 21 national society members. Fresh funds would enable us to expand our capacity to satisfy the growing demand for our trust-building work. Contributions are usually most tax efficient through the national associations of IOCI. Contributions and funding enquiries for international operations can be directed through the Treasurer: treasurer@iofc.org.

For online payments see: www.iofc.org/support

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HIGHLIGHTS 2010-2011

Funding

Initiatives of Change is financed by a combination of individual contributions, its own activities, grants from corporations, foundations and governments, and income from invested funds, mostly received from tax-deductible contributions.

Its major conference centre, owned and managed by the Swiss foundation CAUX-Initiatives of Change, is funded in the manner and by the lease of the Caex facility to a hotel management school for the 10 months of the year. Asia Plateau centre in India is largely funded by training programmes and contributions of conference participants.

Full-time workers receive modest salaries or allowances and in-kind support. Part-time volunteers make significant contributions of their time and skills. Accounts of national societies are audited annually and are available on request.

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Building trust across the world’s divides

Initiatives of Change International

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How it works

Initiatives of Change operates as a movement of people mobilized to transform the way the world works, through change in their own living, values and relationships.

It is a movement within, between and among people…

• within people, a movement of conscience, compassion and spiritual aliveness, transforming motives, attitudes and behaviour in their daily lives.
• between people, a movement of trust built through honest conversation, breaking down hostility and prejudice through the power of dialogue, leading to networks of shared purpose within our fractured societies.
• between people, a movement of teaching and learning, transforming communities to drive change and by demonstrating initiative at Asia Plateau, Panchgani, the IofC centre in India.

The energy for this movement does not come, primarily, from stirring passions about what’s wrong in society, but rather from fears about climate change, for instance, or the ‘clash of civilizations’. These driving forces can be powerful that the movement of Initiatives of Change is triggered more often by real-life experiences of personal and shared transformation.

This involves not only facing one’s ‘shortcomings’, but doing something about them. That ‘something’ can be many things: apology or forgiveness, restitution, standing for some right in the face of injustice or dishonesty, some act of caring beyond what is expected.

Through such acts of moral courage, an energy of hope is released and a new perspective on oneself and the world begins to open up. In the experience of many, it is prompted by an inner moral compulsion or sense of responsibility, starting with an individual but then engaging others, creating a movement between people. These connections often coalesce around an issue of urgent social or global need, sparking initiatives of change that can have far-reaching impacts within and across nations. The movement from personal change to global is not automatic, yet within the 60-year history of Initiatives of Change (formerly Moral Re-Armament), many examples demonstrate this significant link.

Peace and truthbuilding

At the core of IofC’s approach to peacebuilding is the practice of listening to the inner voice of conscience and a readiness to take responsibility rather than blame others. The following are some of the activities conducted by IofC during the year:

• A dramatic bid by Pastor Wuye and Imam Ashafa – former militia leaders turned peacekeepers from Nigeria – to bring reconciliation in Nigeria’s Keffi Valley Province, after communal killings, was documented in a new film by IofC’s FLJ Films.
• The ethnic violence which followed Kenya’s disputed December 2007 election left over 1000 dead and 500,000 displaced.

Described as a “very important film” by former UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, An African Answer was premiered in June 2010 in Nairobi. It went on to tour areas of the country affected by violence. A British launch followed in November, in partnership with the Royal Society of Arts and the House of Commons. Many copies of the DVD have been distributed across Kenya, with support from the British High Commission in Nairobi, amongst others. A training package based on the peace-building methodologies depicted in the film, African Answer will be launched in early 2011.

An earlier film, The Imam and the Pastor, also by FLJ Films has been used in UK prisons following a screening to all 70 Muslim prison chaplains and a presentation on how it can be used in strategies to reduce re-offending and violence. The Imam and the Pastor describes the journey of Wuye and Ashafa from leading rival militias during the 1990s Christian/Muslim clashes, to working together for peace. The imam and pastor themselves have taken their peacebuilding mission to Malaysia, Sudan, the UK and Nordic countries over the last year, facilitated by IofC.

IofC’s Creators of Peace initiative aims to engage women as creators of peace at every level of society, addressing the roots of conflict through the transforming dynamic of a change of heart, starting with oneself. In recent years the programme has launched a number of Creators of Peace Circles – small gatherings of women who together work through material especially designed to deepen their friendship and understanding of each other and their peace-creating capabilities. Facilitator training sessions have enabled more and more women to run Peace Circles. In the last year Peace Circles have become active in over 30 countries, including Australia, South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Fiji, Kenya, Kuwait, Indonesia, Malaysia, Netherland, Romania, South Africa, Taiwan, Uganda and the UK. Its impact has ranged from helping heal local racial tensions in South Africa to breaking through the legacy of fear from years under authoritarian rule in Romania.

In Canada and USA, a series of truthbuilding leadership workshops was organized in response to the call for Truth and Reconciliation by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which followed the launch of the book Truthbuilding – an honest conversation on race, reconciliation, and responsibility by Rob Corcoran, National Director of IofC Canada.

The workshops draw on the methodology outlined in the book, which tells how Richmond, the former Confederate capital and centre of the slave trade, has become a seedbed for interfaith dialogue and truthbuilding. In April 2011, representatives of IofC’s Harlem office in New York, together with the leaders who unveiled 17 historical ‘slave trail’ markers in a ceremony to mark the 150th anniversary of the start of the Civil War, were invited to dinner with the Secretary-General, Kofi Annan.

Transforming society and culture

IofC programmes empower individuals and teams to help shape society, bridging the divide between part of the world where people together ‘in honest conversations’, ways are found to address social ills such as racism, corruption, family breakdown and the spread of AIDS.

In March 2011, the British High Commission in Nairobi, amongst others, invited the Imam and Pastor, a film directed by FLJ Films, to be screened at its headquarters to mark the 150th anniversary of the American Civil War. The screening of the film led to a discussion of the role of religion in the rebuilding of society.

Girinath was so changed by his experience that he decided to take responsibility for their health by taking up exercise or giving up alcohol or tobacco. The East Africa team were invited to dinner with the Vice-President of South Sudan who called for IofC to help with national reconciliation after decades of war.

Members of parliament, senators, traditional chiefs and government officials were the participants in a pilot programme: ‘Women in Leadership’ in Lesotho, run by Alice Cardel, the IofC International Training Director.

Opening the programme, Mafokate Makonya, a Minister for Gender and Youth, Sports and Recreation, said that it came at an important time for Lesotho, coinciding with the launch of the African Women’s Decade which aims to accelerate implementation of policies to empower and improve the situation of women in the continent.

Global economy and sustainability

From the earliest days of IofC, people from all sides of economic life – workers, managers, farmers and financiers – have found common cause in working together to meet the needs of humanity. New energies and creative teamwork emerge when people look beyond their own self-interest, or the narrow interests of their group.

The 2010 Caux Forum for Human Security was the third of a 3-year programme aimed at changing the traditional dynamic of diplomacy by encouraging greater listening, collaboration and attention to past hurts. Held in July at the IofC centre in Caux, Switzerland, the Forum brought together 102 activists from all sections of society with conversations focused on four key areas: overcoming the mistrust created by wars of desire; working for just governance; moving to sustainable economies and lifestyles; and towards an economy that benefits everyone.

A Caux Call to Action was launched at the Forum as a declaration around which a world-wide movement could be organized. A steering council chaired by Clare Short, former UK Minister for International Development, was set up to translate this Call into streams of action.

Bangalore’s state-owned power supply industry, BESCOM, has been transformed after its Managing Director, Tushar Girinath, attended an ‘Ethics in Public Governance’ programme run by IofC in India. Hundreds of senior officers of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) have taken part in the course in recent years with far-reaching effects. Girinath was so changed by his experience that he set out to offer a similar three-day training to the entire 2000 IAS officers. Better relations within the company have led to many important issues being highlighted and resolved. In addition, thousands decided to take responsibility for their health by taking up exercise or giving up alcohol or tobacco.